

Southern Exposure

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Winter's Promise



Southern Exposure

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INSTITUTE FOR SOUTHERN STUDIES REPORT

With this issue, we close our eighth full year of publishing *Southern Exposure*. Most issues – unlike this one – have taken a topical focus, exploring one or another aspect of the broader American experience as it relates uniquely, or not so uniquely, to the South. Books in the *Southern Exposure* series now cover subjects ranging from military spending to architecture, religion to labor organizing, land use to sports. Hopefully, we've helped build a library that not only informs, but that also inspires our readers to deepen both their appreciation for the power of the human spirit and their commitment to challenge those institutional systems that would restrain it.

Each of us on the staff of *Southern Exposure* has been moved in one way or another by the waves of suffering and celebration that come into our office and are channeled onto these pages – the shakily handwritten letter with an urgent message from an older reader; the closeup faces of Florida's migrant workers; the partly bitter, partly confident testimony of an 80-year-old veteran of the fight for social justice; the joyful voices of J.P. Stevens workers explaining what it means to finally win a union contract; the stinging poetry of a self-taught prisoner; an expose of a chemical company poisoning an entire river valley. Fortunately, for our sanity and perhaps for our sensitivity to the ongoing struggles in our society, we on the staff are not confined to our small offices in Durham, North Carolina. The words and images inspire us, too, as an organization, to move beyond the role of documentor or reporter to take an active part in a variety of projects affecting the shape of the South's future.

In addition to *Southern Exposure*, we double as the staff of the Institute for Southern Studies; through the Institute, we sponsor a host of other research, education and media programs that link us with other networks of activists, researchers, creative writers, community organizers, grass-roots leaders, teachers and others concerned with

social change.

Sometimes that work feeds directly back into *Southern Exposure*, as for example when we published the special issue on nuclear power ("Tower of Babel"). Since 1972, Institute staff members have been investigating utility companies, helping launch grass-roots organizations to challenge their abuses and strategizing with both the new and the more established organizations about the best ways to end the nuclear madness, guarantee a "life-line" of safe energy for all, and shift to a renewable-energy-based political economy. Years of practical research and day-to-day work with citizens concerned about energy issues ultimately influence how we write about nuclear power in *Southern Exposure*, and helped us make our special issue on the subject uniquely useful.

In many cases, however, our work as an Institute remains unseen to the readers of *Southern Exposure*. Part of that work entails raising funds to get our issue/books into the right hands so they can be effective educational tools and agents of change. We've been overjoyed, for example, with the wide distribution of "Mark of the Beast," our special issue on the Ku Klux Klan, by organizations throughout the country as their efforts intensify to end that violent vestige of nineteenth century social hatred. Now we're seeking money to reprint thousands more copies of "Mark of the Beast" to distribute through the dozens of organizations in the National Anti-Klan Network.

Other aspects of our work lead us into whole new areas, such as a project to help local textile unions use the media in their towns to educate workers and the larger public about the problems of cotton dust and brown lung disease. Or a series of films to record the fading voices of traditional Southerners, whether old-time banjo players or Primitive Baptists. Or a program providing groups fighting capital punishment with resource materials highlighting the sanity, safety and sanctity of alternatives to state murder.

In many cases we can raise outside money to support these projects as well as the costs of *South-*

ern Exposure not recovered from subscriptions or individual sales. Unfortunately, fundraising from foundations – especially for a magazine – has proven increasingly difficult, so we have turned to other sources for help. Pantheon Books, for example, will be publishing a series of books drawn largely from past issues of *Southern Exposure* (see ad for news about the first book due out in January, 1981, entitled *Working Lives*). Royalties from Pantheon will help, as will new grants from labor unions and church agencies. But with a total budget of \$250,000, the Institute needs *you* to help, too. In 1978, we asked our subscribers to make as generous a donation as they could to help us over a tough period. We're in such a period again, and we sincerely hope you will be at least as generous as you have been in the past. (All donations to the Institute are tax-deductible.)

With your help, we have every intention of continuing our diverse educational and organizing work, constantly sustained by that same strength of spirit and tradition of struggle which emerges through the pages of this magazine. The Ronald

Reagan years need not mean greater discouragement and cynicism about the prospects for positive social change in America and the South. All of us are still called upon to tap the best in our collective past, to reach out to one another and back to our roots in our communities, to listen again to the frustrations and hopes of everyday people and translate them into a positive vision of greater caring and sharing throughout our worldwide community.

As we learn in this issue, we must and will continue the search for a language to express our experiences, a music to help us through the bad times, a political party that is true to its members, a way of working that we control and that is fulfilling. We can also conclude from reading the following pages that, if people managed to survive the lynch mobs and tobacco barons of yesterday, and the migrant camps and death row cells of today, then we too have the strength within us, between us, to carry on. We are ready for the battle ahead. We will stand with you, and we hope you will stand with us.

If You Think Today's News Is Bad...

... read this letter Virginia Durr wrote a friend on November 5, 1951, as the Cold War, McCarthy Era and Korean War turned America to the Right. The letter came in a collection compiled by Marie Jemison which we will be running in a later issue. But on reading this one, exactly 29 years after it was written – the day after the Reagan Right-Wing Revival – we felt you might find some measure of hope in knowing that people of good will have gone through hard times before. Four years and a month after Virginia wrote this letter, her friend Rosa Parks refused to yield her bus seat to a white passenger, launching the Montgomery bus boycott and cracking the repression and complacency then gripping America. (Virginia and her husband Cliff had been active in social change movements since the '30s, moving to Washington during the New Deal and returning to Montgomery shortly before this letter was written.)

Dear Otto:

The other night we went to hear [U.S. Senator] John Sparkman, and he bore down big on the old line, fighting "the Holy War against the forces of Evil, the Free Nations uniting in the grandest effort of the human spirit to repeal aggression, we must arm and arm and

tax ourselves to death to keep the world 'free' and save it from the Soviets, etc., etc." He was cheered and cheered, and applauded and applauded and so it does seem to go down. And yet, privately it doesn't seem to sit so well, the prices and taxes are terrible. The young boys going off are leaving sadness behind, and they don't know why they are fighting. When a young boy goes off and thinks he may be going off to die, he at least wants to know why – very definitely. But they will repeat like parrots their indoctrination courses, "it's them or us" – "We had better fight there than here." "I had rather die than be a slave of the Communists." Otto, I wonder if ever before in the history of the world except in Germany have people ever been so taken in?

Personally our life goes on just about as before. Cliff has improved a great deal, although the doctor still does not give him permission to go to work. The children are well . . . but I cannot deny that I am terribly lonely. For so many years, for so long that I had begun to take it for granted, I have been in communion with people that believed and worked for a solution to the ills of the world and honestly believed – whatever their differences among themselves – that there was a solution, so that however terrible the present was – yet there was hope for the future. Now I am utterly cut off, and except for a little reading there is no contact at all with those people or that world. . . . I listen

to the conversations here, and there is general acceptance that the world is an evil place, that mankind is an evil species, and to walk in fear and be wary is the chief end of man. Also to compete for a little more security against his fellow man. Of course as always, there is hope among the children, and on a personal basis there is both love and charity, but amid so much arid desert of despair. Cliff is a very much stronger person than I am, and he is not so much affected and then perhaps he doesn't expect so much as I do, he is always surprised and delighted when he finds even a glimmer among the people we see. I think it is so dim that I cannot see much hope for it – but he does. The sullen repressed resentment of the Negroes – the bleak despair of the poor whites – and the frustrated cheapness of so many people who have a certain measure of economic security and no moral security whatever, and what we see so often among the "old families" is the resigned acceptance of despair and tragedy and often madness. It really gets me down at times, and unless I can find some means of working to change it, or at least help in some way however small, I think it would drive me to despair. But is this the pattern all over the country? Do you think so? Is it just as bad in New York? Are we a doomed people? Destroyed by our own sins? I wish I knew and I wish I knew what to do.

– Love, Va.

Stevens Victory

In 17 years, an infant can grow to become a parent, a nation can swing from idealistic Kennedy liberalism to egocentric Reagan conservatism, and a handful of millworkers can succeed in their David-and-Goliath battle with the nation's most notorious labor law violator.

Seventeen years after organizing began at J.P. Stevens' Southern plants, and six years after workers at the seven mills in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, voted to be represent-

ed by the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers (ACTWU), the company finally agreed to a two-and-a-half year contract which gave the workers every major provision they had demanded through the union. Being there, in the midst of the people who had fought so long for this path-breaking settlement, was a special

Third shift, October 19, 1980: One of the first workers to go to work under a union contract at J.P. Stevens.

Images Unlimited



privilege we will not soon forget.

Each time we visit workers in Roanoke Rapids we come away more impressed by their tenacity and commitment. They held together, black and white, men and women, old and young, for six long years after voting for union representation. They held together despite being alternately ignored and besieged in divisive ways by the media, despite being harassed on the job, ridiculed by a pro-Stevens Employees' Committee, caught more than once in the middle of internal union politics and blackmailed by the company's refusal to grant them two wage increases unless they settled for a weak contract. Their enduring patience — some would say it is peculiarly Southern — eventually paid off: on October 19, 1980, hundreds of joyous Stevens workers gathered in the auditorium of Roanoke Rapids High School to ratify their first union contract. A few days later, workers in three other mills also ratified the contract, bringing the total to about 3,500 workers in 10 Stevens plants.

The new contract gives workers the right to a hearing — with a union representative at their side — on all grievances, disciplinary actions, job transfers, firings or workload changes. If the two sides don't agree on a reasonable settlement of an issue, it automatically goes to an impartial "third-party" arbitrator whose decision is binding on both company and union. Workers also won the right to a seniority and job-posting system which will undercut the company's traditional method of promoting "favorites," supervisor's "pets" or in-laws.

"These are things I've been working for for 17 years," said Maurine Hedgepeth, one of hundreds of pro-union workers illegally fired by Stevens who were only restored to their jobs after lengthy court battles. "I feel just wonderful."

"The only thing we know is faith," commented Bennett Taylor. "Now that it's come down to the signing, I believe it was well worth it."

"We have arbitration, seniority, checkoff, job posting," James Boone noted. "These are some of the things we need to make a foundation for a strong union, and we have that."

While the media focused on the courtroom and the innovative anti-corporate tactics employed by ACTWU to pressure Stevens, it was the spirit of people like Hedgepeth, Taylor and

Boone which made the victory possible. Hundreds of thousands of supporters throughout the country shared in the Stevens workers' struggle by boycotting Stevens products and conducting educational programs in their communities and organizations. The national boycott, in turn, helped sustain the workers through one of the longest and most bitter labor struggles in history.

The fight was over an old-fashioned issue: whether or not Stevens could dictate every condition of workers' lives once they entered the mill gate. But in attempting to avoid a unionized workforce, Stevens engaged in a fierce union-busting effort which became most notable for its flagrant disregard of federal labor law.

"They [the company] thought we were gonna split and blame the union," explained Charlotte Mosley in response to a question about Stevens' delaying tactics and withholding of wage increases put into effect in other plants. "They thought we'd say, 'Hey, you get out of here.' But we didn't. We knew that without the union we didn't have a chance at all."

By forcing the company to bargain on all workplace changes, even minor disciplinary matters, the union tied up Stevens' management in Roanoke Rapids and, as Whitney Stevens admitted in May, reduced the profit level at the plants to the point that signing a union contract "is in the best interest of our company."

Victories against the corporate giants of our time are few and far between. Ironically, even when they come, we often look for some flaw or sign of a less-than-pure triumph to undercut what would otherwise be a moment of genuine celebration. The victory at Roanoke Rapids on October 19 wasn't like that. It was a fantastic day, a high-spirited victory worthy of the best praise we could muster.

The Institute did not even exist 17 years ago when people like Maurine Hedgepeth began organizing for justice at Stevens' Roanoke Rapids plant. But since 1974, we have been involved in one aspect or another of the Stevens campaign: researching the company's operations, sales strategies and corporate interlocks; initiating a stockholders' resolution challenge that was broadened by the union into a sophisticated corporate campaign; helping start Southerners for Economic Jus-

tice, an interracial religious and civil rights organization that rallies support for the rights of workers throughout the South; investigating union-busting tactics and possible illegal activities of the company and its agents; conducting educational seminars for workers and organizers on the company and Southern labor history; and chronicling the ongoing struggle in *Southern Exposure* (see Vol. IV, 1-2; VI, 1; VI, 2; VIII, 2).

Along with Southerners for Economic Justice, Institute staff members are continuing to work in several locations in the region to document the abuses of anti-union corporations and to help workers exercise their rights of free assembly, speech and collective bargaining.

Southern Exposure



Our Promised Land

"Speed now the day when the plains and the hills and all the wealth thereof shall be the people's own ..."

Ceremony of the Land,
Southern Tenant Farmer's Union (1937)

Remember the good old days when posters were artistic expressions of the movement's goals and ideals? We do too. So, by popular demand, we offer Southern Exposure's classic "Our Promised Land" poster, picture above. (The actual size is 20X28 inches.) Printed in deep brown on superior quality ivory cover-weight paper, "Our Promised Land" can be yours for only \$3.50. Just send us a note plus check or money order for the number of posters you want and we'll rush them right back to you in a protective cardboard mailing tube.

We don't expect the battle at J.P. Stevens to be entirely ended, of course. As we reported in our Summer, 1980, issue, the company may try to decertify the union with a new election after a campaign to undermine the grievance and job-posting system it agreed to follow. Union officials are well aware of this possibility. Says staffer Clyde Bush, "This company has been at war with the union for nearly 20 years. I don't expect that to change overnight."

Nevertheless, the victory of J.P. Stevens workers should inspire us all to know that our efforts can make a difference and that mass mobilization with a strong base in a given community and union can achieve tremendous gains.

Brown Lung

THE HIDDEN COSTS

We could hear her crying in the hallway, so by the time Len Stanley reached our office door, we knew that she had bad news. "Lucy Taylor just died," she said quietly. She took a deep breath and then let loose: "She's dead and the damn company's still fighting her disability claim."

Lucy Taylor died of brown lung – byssinosis – after breathing cotton dust for 35 years in J.P. Stevens' Roanoke Rapids plants. Forced in 1963 to quit her job because of then-unexplained breathing problems, Lucy Taylor suffered for 12 years before a doctor told her the truth about the cause of her disabling illness. She immediately filed a worker's compensation claim with the North Carolina Industrial Commission. For the next five years she battled the commission, Stevens and the state courts to overturn a statute of limitations which denied compensation to workers who couldn't prove that their disability occurred within a year after their last exposure to cotton dust.

In September, 1980, the North Carolina Supreme Court ruled in Mrs. Taylor's favor and awarded \$12,000 plus an additional \$4,000 interest for the years the company fought her claim. Stevens and its insurance carrier, Liberty Mutual, filed an appeal, but after 50 Brown Lung Association members protested at Liberty Mutual's headquarters, they dropped the appeal on all but the interest; the appeal

on the interest is still pending.

Even with the interest, the total award amounts to only about \$1,000 per year for each year of suffering, surely not enough to pay Lucy Taylor's medical bills during that period, probably not even enough to pay her annual pharmacy bill. Still, Stevens mobilized its legal staff to appeal the pittance awarded to Lucy Taylor.

Stevens continues to claim, as do all other textile manufacturers, that brown lung is not caused by cotton dust. Rather, they say, it is the workers themselves who are responsible because they smoke cigarettes, or have asthma or bronchitis, and therefore "react" adversely to the dust. So far the courts have not accepted this blame-the-victim rationale and after long delays the federal government has finally enacted a new cotton dust standard which will require mills to reduce the level of dust to 0.2 milligrams per cubic meter by 1984.

But the industry believes it has a trump card: a cost/benefit analysis should be conducted, they contend, to determine if it's "cost-effective" to clean up the workplace rather than just let people get sick. Needless to say, if the courts declare a worker's health to be worth a mere \$1,000 per year, Stevens and other manufacturers will have little difficulty winning their case against spending the \$625 million OSHA estimates it will cost to provide a healthy working environment. The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear the industry's cost/benefit argument this term, and its decision – expected this spring – will have a profound impact on other occupational safety and health regulations as well.

During the past year, Len Stanley and Chip Hughes, research associates with the Institute, have been conducting a study on the social, human and economic impact of byssinosis on its victims, their families and their communities. The study grew out of the realization by the Institute and the Brown Lung Association, an organization of byssinosis victims, of the necessity for documenting the extensive human costs and other intangible losses incurred by textile families whose breadwinners become prematurely disabled by the incurable chronic disease.

Through interviews with brown lung victims and their families, Stanley and Hughes have produced a pioneering study which will complement other documented "costs" to occupational disease victims, and which will provide a research model intended to strengthen federal health regulations for the benefit of thousands of people disabled in textile and other hazardous industries.

The cold calculations of cost/benefit analyses of human suffering are morally objectionable, but if the costs of byssinosis disability are going to be counted and compared, then *all* costs, not just lost lung function or lost wages,

Lucy Taylor presents "Cotton Dust Kills" poster to N.C. Insurance Commissioner John Ingram.

Len Stanley



should be included. Most of those interviewed by Hughes and Stanley were forced to leave their mill jobs in their mid-50s, long before their expected retirement age. In Southern working class culture, where jobs often provide the major source of self-worth, pride and identity, this forced job loss is a crushing blow to self-esteem. Chronic depression and increased isolation from friends and co-workers follow the worker's premature retirement.

Skyrocketing medical bills, coupled with a drastic loss of income, create family economic crises which can be lessened only by dependence on grown children for financial support or by additional work for other family members. The economic stress, in turn, jeopardizes family and marital relationships. Anguish, despair and hopelessness are sociologists' words for damage and troubles that disabled millworkers have no satisfactory words to describe. They experience it, as one victim put it, as "living like some used-up thing."

The raw, nameless fear that comes from facing the choices brown lung victims must face is best summarized by a worker herself: "I felt like the world had just turned upside down and left me without a place to put my feet on. I had worked in the mills since I was a child, and suddenly I had no job and no money and I was sick, too sick to ever work in my life again. I was so scared. Where was I gonna go?"

Lucy Taylor was lucky in some ways. She never consid-

ered herself a failure because of her disability, and trouble didn't frighten her. Through her work as an organizer and spokesperson for the Brown Lung Association, she helped bring pride and self-respect to hundreds of victims. Together they overcame despair and hopelessness by engaging in a struggle for recognition of and compensation for those who are or will become disabled by the disease, and in a new effort to prevent byssinosis for future generations.

Lack of physical strength could not stop Lucy Taylor. She was, in the words of one Brown Lung staff member, "a hero for her courageous battle and for the strength she shared with everybody else." She met with and encouraged brown lung victims throughout the Carolinas and traveled across the country to educate and counsel and organize others around occupational health issues.

Recently public television broadcast a moving documentary, "Song of the Canary," which exposed health hazards in several industries. Lucy Taylor was one of the victims interviewed on the program. When asked about her work with the Brown Lung Association, she responded that her goal was not to build a large organization. Rather, she intended to work toward the elimination of the organization by eliminating the need for it.

"There's not one of us who wouldn't trade all the compensation in the world if we could have our health back," she declared. Lucy Taylor lost her health and now her life, but the battle she helped begin lives on.

CRACKS IN THE TOWER

From its earliest days, the Institute has identified energy and utility issues as focal points of corporate abuse: inequitable rates and service, environmental destruction, discrimination, hazardous working conditions, poisonous wastes and suppression of dissidence are all standard by-products of energy industries.

In recent years, the Institute has focused heavily on the Southern nuclear power industry. A special issue of *Southern Exposure*, "Tower of Babel," profiled the growth of each stage of the nuclear fuel cycle in the South, provided in-depth research on each of the South's major private utilities, and examined successful organizing strategies already underway in the region. This information, in turn, has been used by utility/nuclear activists in the South and around the

nation as a guide to preparing testimony, educational materials and research on issues of local concern.

Drawing on the expertise developed in preparing "Tower of Babel," Institute staffers now work with individuals and groups throughout the region to provide resources and contacts for further anti-nuclear work. From a South Carolina construction worker who discovered design flaws in a nuclear reactor to a lone woman fighting a Louisiana nuclear power plant, people have contacted our office to seek help with their local battles.

Staff members have also spoken at numerous conferences, conducted workshops on nuclear and utility issues, linked grassroots groups with resource people in other regions of the country and helped groups plan strategies and map out their organizing efforts. Through staff research efforts, we helped prepare stockholder challenges to nuclear programs at Carolina Power & Light and South Carolina Electric & Gas; compiled information for the AFL-CIO Building Trades Department on the operations of Brown and Root Construction Company, a notorious anti-union firm which also does nuclear contracting; and worked with the AFSC

Nuclear Transportation Project to document the shipment of nuclear wastes through North Carolina.

The Institute's interest in energy extends beyond merely opposing the growth of nuclear power, however. We are also assisting the development and implementation of alternative energy sources through the newly formed North Carolina chapter of the Labor Committee for Safe Energy and Full Employment and the North Carolina Coalition for Renewable Energy Resources, which educates the public about energy options and develops model projects demonstrating the feasibility of alternative energy sources.

Finally, the Institute is keeping an eye out for further developments in the energy wars which could bring environmental and economic disaster to the region. We are presently investigating renewed attempts to extract oil, natural gas and uranium from the Appalachians. We will keep you informed of these developments in upcoming issues of *Southern Exposure*.

If you or your organization would like assistance in local research or organizing, contact: Jim Overton, Institute for Southern Studies, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702, (919) 688-8167.



Allan Troxler



Our South

June 28, 1980

Two hundred thousand people gathered on San Francisco's Market Street for the Gay Pride Day parade. A solitary banner, nearly lost in the throng, read "North Carolina." Its bearer reported with mixed joy and sadness that "many rushed from the crowd to tell about where they came from, and to ask how things were now. Clearly, many who left the South feel deeply conflicted . . . and would like to be able to return."

To be *able* to return. To North Carolina or to anywhere in the South, to families, neighborhoods, jobs.

It is perhaps too easy for Southern lesbians and gay men to take refuge in the homosexual ghettos of San Francisco and New York, where they will be accepted more often than taunted, where they can be open more often than secretive. Often it is essential to get away. But for a few, time spent in other parts of the country has nurtured gay pride and made it possible to return to the South to speak out against the hatred and fear invoked in the name of the Lord by Jerry Falwell and Anita Bryant.

One who has returned is Allan Troxler, an artist, writer and former *Southern Exposure* staff member. Troxler and Mab Segrest, an editor of the magazine *Feminary*, are developing a Southern gay history project under the auspices of the Institute for Southern Studies.

Entitled "Our South," the first phase of the project is to develop a slide presentation which will document lesbian and gay culture from the "hermaphrodite" Native Americans

discovered by seventeenth century French explorers in Florida to the isolated lesbian in Moncks Corner, South Carolina, and the lesbian and gay activists in Atlanta, New Orleans and Richmond.

"Just as the reconstruction of history and culture has been central to the liberation of blacks and women," explain Segrest and Troxler, "we too need to undo years of censorship and misinformation. The process of articulating Southern lesbian/gay culture will strengthen networks and, eventually, provide an atmosphere in which we can breathe and share and grow."

Once production of the slide show is complete, "Our South" will begin its outreach phase. Troxler and Segrest will travel the back roads and the interstates, wherever a few people or a crowd will gather to learn of a hidden history and to tell their own stories. It will provide a forum for homosexuals and heterosexuals alike to begin to break the bonds of silence and shame, to counter the sanctimonious falsehoods shouted by the Falwells and the Bryants in our dialect, in our names.

In the best tradition of non-violent social change, "Our South" will speak truth to power, confront ignorance with reason, transform silence into affirmation. The staff will hand out information about legal services, organizations, counseling, publications and conferences. "And," say Troxler and Segrest, "we will tell them about the folks we visited the night before in the next county who want to get something happening regularly. Our project will contribute to the regional

coordination of gay activities and provide back-up media for local organizing efforts."

The South, of course, is not unique in its repression of gay rights. Our attempts to raise money for "Our South" through more liberal Northern foundations have met with little success. But the determined spirits of Allan Troxler and Mab Segrest have infected other Institute staff members: some are looking into the possibility of publishing a special issue of *Southern Exposure* which would be a companion to "Our South;" others are helping to set up grass-roots fundraising events as a way of circumventing the frustrating lack of foundation support. It may take more time and more energy than we originally anticipated, but "Our South" will happen. Your support will help: "Our South," Institute for Southern Studies, P.O. Box 1832, Durham, NC 27702.

"Magnificent"* says Julian Bond

"Here at last is a book that captures the soul and struggle of the everyday people who built the South."


"A must for every union official, member, progressive, and anyone else concerned with the future of working people."

—DOUGLAS FRASER,
President, U.A.W.

WORKING LIVES



The Southern Exposure History of Labor in the South
Edited by
MARC S. MILLER
Introduced by
Herbert Gutman

85 photos, 416 pages.
Paper \$7.95, cloth \$17.95; now at your bookstore
PANTHEON 

Working Lives is the first in a series of books that the staff of the Institute and *Southern Exposure* are preparing; the next two will be an expanded version of *Growing Up Southern*, to be published in the summer of 1981, and an anthology on Southern women.

Whose South

The National Committee in Support of Community-Based Organizations represents one of the broadest collections of civil rights, civil liberties, religious and community leaders assembled in recent years. We at the Institute have joined their effort to expose and denounce a little-known, but utterly despicable, attack by the U.S. government on one of the most vital groups now serving poor, black and rural Southerners: the Federation of Southern Cooperatives.

Since its incorporation 13 years ago, the Federation has grown to represent some 30,000 low-income families in 10 states in more than 120 member-cooperatives including farm production and marketing coops, credit unions, housing organizations and fish harvesting and craft-making cooperatives. At every stage of its development, the Federation has met resistance from local politicians determined to thwart the political and economic enfranchisement of the rural poor. The strongest opposition comes from officials in Sumter County, Alabama, where the Federation has been headquartered since 1970. It originally moved to the county to assist a group of 40 black families who had been evicted from cotton plantations for daring to register to vote and to demand their share of the federal cotton price support payments. When the Federation began helping the families purchase their own land, they were immediately challenged through a series of ingenious law suits spearheaded by I. Drayton Pruitt, Jr., mayor of Lexington, the Sumter County seat. Today Pruitt still leads a white power structure that sees itself embattled and growing desperate in a county over 60 percent black. "We don't need the Federation," Pruitt told a reporter in early 1980. "The biggest problem poor people have in our county is transportation. I'd like to see the Federation shut down and we could replace it with a Greyhound bus. We'd do a hell of a lot better, don't you think so?"

Fighting such sentiment has not been easy, but the Federation has steadily increased its role as an advocacy and resource organization for its members. It has received over \$15 million since its incorporation, including grants from foundations and churches. In recent years, 80 to 90 percent of its funds have come from such federal agencies as the Community Services Administration, CETA, HEW and VISTA for programs ranging from installing wood stoves in farm homes to starting a rural health clinic.

But a series of mysterious and highly suspicious events now indicates that the federal government is acting in collusion with local racist politicians to strangle the Federation once and for all. In 1979, about 250 white leaders — including Alabama Congressman Richard Shelby, representatives of both U.S. senators from Alabama and local officials — met at the Cotton Patch Restaurant to devise a strategy to "get the Federation."

Pruitt and two others formally requested that Shelby ask for a GAO audit of the Federation's use of federal funds; but in November, 1979, after a preliminary examination, the GAO decided not to pursue the inquest. Then on December 31, 1979, the Federation received a subpoena from the U.S. Attorney in Birmingham, who had convened a grand jury to investigate the organization. The Federation complied with a demand for some 10 file-cabinet drawers of financial documents covering five years, and it continued to cooperate with further requests for data and appearances before the grand jury. But given the repeated use of politically guided grand jury investigations to snuff out organizing activities by civil rights, labor and community

Not in my name.

Because there are better ways to protect our safety, promote the sanctity of life, and fairly administer justice in our State, I hereby withdraw my support from all those who would conduct executions in my name.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ Group/Church _____

(If not collected, send to Clearinghouse, 232 W. Pensacola, Tallahassee 32301)

There are better ways to protect my life.

The State of Florida, led by Gov. Robert Graham, believes it must kill some people in the name of protecting other people, like you and me. But:

- Executions reject God's demand for mercy and deny the power of God's grace to redeem anyone, anywhere; killing is morally wrong.
- Statistics show executions do not cause the number of murders to decrease; killing does not stop killing, it only serves revenge.
- A disproportionate number of blacks and poor people are sent to jail and sentenced to die; executions reflect and further the racial and class biases in our society.
- Human error will inevitably result in the State killing innocent people, the very thing it must abhor. The Pitts & Lee case is an example of two men sentenced to die who were later proven innocent.
- Alternatives exist, including life imprisonment, counseling for those who need it, prison industries to compensate families of victims. There are surely better ways to promote the sanctity of life than by killing people. Other states and countries have found ways. So can we.

For some or all these reasons, we do not want the State to kill people in our name, for our protection or to "even the score," and we therefore make the pledge on the reverse side of this card.

We recently designed pledge cards like the one shown here for use in a summer organizing project sponsored by the Florida Clearinghouse on Criminal Justice. Student volunteers built local organizations in several Florida cities, emphasizing alternative solutions to capital crimes and, on a statewide Justice Day, collected hundreds of cards to help counter the claim trumpeted by Governor Bob Graham and the media that Floridians want criminals put to death. The Institute for Southern Studies believes that there are better ways to protect society from murderers. If you do too, if you'd like similar pledge cards for your organization, or if you'd like the name of the anti-death penalty organization in your state — please contact us. As of October 20, 1980, 500 of the 690 people on death row were condemned to die by Southern state governments. Cards above are half actual size.

organizations, the Federation naturally grew increasingly suspicious when 10 months after the first subpoena no formal charge was yet placed against it.

It began calling on its friends in the South and elsewhere to help end what seemed a prolonged fishing expedition designed to tie up its staff, shroud it in a cloud of suspicion that would make future funding doubtful, and perhaps eventually find some misdeed that could be prosecuted. The National Committee in Support of Community-Based Organizations was formed in October to help pressure the U.S. Attorney General to resolve the issue, specify charges or quit harassing the Federation. Representatives of the Committee also traveled to Alabama and uncovered for the first time the existence of the Cotton Patch plot. After several heated meetings and exchanges with the Justice Department, members of the Committee and the Federation are hopeful as of this writing that the political nature of this inquest has been exposed and that it will be resolved before the Federation suffers any further harassment. We'll keep you posted.

STOP THE KLAN



“Mark of the Beast.” *Southern Exposure*’s special report on the Ku Klux Klan (Summer, 1980) takes on critical significance as we recoil from the acquittal of six Nazi/Klansmen for the public execution of five Communist Workers Party members in Greensboro. That the foreman of the jury could unashamedly announce before television cameras that the killers were not only innocent, they were “right,” should serve as an omen to all of us concerned with justice.

Until the verdict yesterday, November 17, we drew encouragement from the positive response to “Mark of the Beast.” Not only have civil rights and other progressive groups flooded us with requests for the special issue, but commercial bookstores throughout the country have ordered and re-ordered. Today our optimism has been tempered. It is a tragedy that, only a month after North Carolinians at J.P. Stevens plants demonstrated how black and white citizens can join together for mutual economic improvement, other North Carolinians have chosen to legitimize the racist violence of a group of misguided white bigots who have no solution for anyone’s problems.

The day after the verdict, we joined our colleagues in the National Anti-Klan Network at a press conference. As we said in our statement to the press, the acquittal was totally outrageous — not because we believe the courts should provide revenge with a death for a death, but because the decision repudiates every standard of human decency and the axiom that equal justice is available for all. The murderers were set free because an atmosphere had been created to blame the victims for their own slaughter. The Justice Department’s Community Relations Service kept Greensboro’s progressive community divided and confused, making it virtually impossible for local groups to respond quickly and candidly to the November 3 tragedy and its aftermath. The CRS sabotage effort was so thorough that a news report that a Greensboro police informant and a federal agent were active participants in the Klan/Nazi execution squad was ignored almost as soon as the ink dried on that edition of the *Greensboro Daily News*.

Greensboro had been carefully groomed, its apathy exquisitely honed to tolerate the most blatant abuses of human and constitutional rights. The only voices which had not been suppressed were those of Communist Workers Party members, who had achieved a remarkable record for alienating progressives, moderates and conservatives with equal finesse. The more they said — and it is now clear that most of their predictions were accurate — the more people feared and/or hated them. The federally orchestrated Catch-22 was complete.

“The Greensboro decision follows a long line of court decisions that have established a trend of acquittals of

racist white men who have murdered and assaulted black people, labor organizers and others who have stood up for human rights, equality and dignity,” said Leah Wise, a National Anti-Klan Network spokesperson, at the news conference on November 18. It was one of the largest gatherings of local and national newspeople in North Carolina in many years. They were eager for a story, but not for the truth. When we refused to speculate about the possibility of violence in the black community as a result of the Klan/Nazi acquittal, they put away their cameras, notepads and tape recorders and hurried off on their “riot watch.” The truth is that open season has been declared on racial minorities and dissidents:

- Miami: police who bashed in the head of black insurance sales representative Arthur McDuffie were acquitted;
- Decatur, Alabama: a black bystander who attempted to defend his family from a robed Klansman who shot into a crowd of civil rights demonstrators was convicted by a jury of six white men and six white women of assault (the Klansman was not indicted);
- Johnson County, Georgia: local officials refused to indict Sheriff Roland Attaway for his warrantless mass arrest of local black activists who had been working on such “subversive” issues as capital improvements for their neighborhoods and employment of blacks in county and city government;
- Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, Georgia, Texas and several Northern states: Klan and Nazi vigilante training camps have been set up under the noses of FBI and state police agencies.

The history of the fiery cross and the swastika can not be forgotten. But to date there has not been a sustained protest by white religious leaders, intellectuals, trade unionists, students, writers — the old allies of the civil rights movement.

There have been exceptions, of course: last February 2, 10,000 people marched in Greensboro to protest the slayings and heard Southern white leaders like Reverend Iberus Hacker of the Council of Southern Mountains urge white Christians to come forth and declare, “The Klan does not speak in my name,” and Anne Braden of the Southern Organizing Committee counsel that white resistance to racist terrorism has emerged throughout the U.S., “but it has to be organized.” And on the day following the acquittal in Greensboro, long-time peace activists staged

the largest silent vigil in that city since the Vietnam War.

Organizing such broadbased resistance has been the objective of the National Anti-Klan Network since its beginnings in August, 1979. Of the four task forces of NAKN, the Legal Task Force has been the most active. Coordinated through the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York, the Legal Task Force assists in filing personal damage suits and injunctions against Klansmen, and is developing plans for congressional hearings on Klan harassment as well as on government complicity in illegal Klan activities and subsequent coverups.

NAKN has also organized a Labor Task Force, a Religious Community Task Force and an Educational Task Force. One example of an educational drama designed especially for white audiences is "If I Live to See Next Fall" performed by the Play Group of Knoxville. The two-act play, written by John O'Neal with music and lyrics by Si Kahn, dramatizes the struggle of a young tenant farmer to overcome the KKK's racist appeals that he associate with the class interests of the owner rather than other land tillers, black or white. With the reprint of "Mark of the Beast," the Institute plans to direct substantial staff time to the educational effort. We will continue to work with grassroots and regional groups to develop local leadership, programs and educational materials so that South-

erners can defuse the sophisticated counter-organizing tactics of federal, state and private agents and bring us back on the path of progressive social change.

Lastly, we urge those involved in anti-racist organizing to remember the relationship of corporate exploitation — in the U.S. and abroad — to racism. As we learned so painfully in the last few decades, they are inextricably woven.

For information about anti-Klan work in your area, contact: NAKN, c/o IFCO, 348 Convent Ave., 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10031. Or contact us at the Institute.

(Last minute, November 21: As we go to press, demonstrators spearheaded by black students across North Carolina have begun forcefully demanding that the U.S. Attorney General bring federal indictments against the Klan and Nazi killers in Greensboro. It happened that a scheduled visit by the Institute's president, Julian Bond, to our office on November 20 came only three days after the not-guilty verdicts. We had already arranged his appearance in a small auditorium at North Carolina Central University, but his speech to an overflow crowd of 1,000 angry, spirited students boiled over into a march to the federal building in Durham. Following a three-hour demonstration, the black U.S. Attorney General responsible for this part of the state met with students and admitted he could do nothing unless massive pressure was brought against the Justice Dept. Organizing at Central and elsewhere continues; whatever happens, the display of energy and outrage by young black Southerners proves that the possibilities for a new movement abound.)

NEXT YEAR'S LINEUP

Southern Exposure is the product not only of the staff here in Durham, but of professional journalists, scholars, artists, writers and social change activists throughout the region and the rest of the nation — that is, our readers. We are continually watching the mails for new contributions from our readers and for fresh ideas on directions to follow in the future.

The next three special topic issues on our schedule, which alternate with general topic issues, will focus on the 25 years of civil-rights struggle since the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the literature of today's South, and working women.

The Freedom Movement sparked by the Montgomery bus boycott has touched and influenced the lives of more Americans than any other social movement in this century. But already its real story is being distorted by the media and lost to new generations. Our freedom issue will relive those days through interviews, photographs and analysis of the impact of the era on the nation and the world, and through case studies of current civil-

rights struggles and the continuing problems America faces.

In keeping with our tradition of interpreting and analyzing the changing South, the literature issue will explore the ways in which past and present shape the unique perspectives with which Southern authors, actors and artists view their world. It will also examine a variety of activities related to literary expression, such as community writing workshops, the struggle of small presses and the way literature is taught in the schools.

The final special issue on our 1981 calendar will focus on those women who comprise 80 percent of the female labor force: the women who work in clerical, factory, service and sales jobs. "Working Women" will also include material about women in jobs traditionally dominated by men — from coal miners to loom fixers, truck drivers to construction workers. This issue of *Southern Exposure* is being designed to provide the resource materials which the recently developed grassroots organizing and advocacy projects have found so needed . . . and so lacking.

Following "Working Women," we have a number of ideas of our own and proposals under consideration for issues on the coastal South, on rural

economic development, on Southern Indians, on military spending and on music. We look forward to hearing from you — on what subjects you want us to cover, and with contributions of articles, interviews, photographs, poetry. For a fuller description of planned special issues or for a copy of our guidelines for writers, contact us at P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702; phone (919) 688-8167.

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photos by Marc Miller

workers' owned

by Marc Miller

Six a.m. Already the women driving into the grassy field that is the parking lot for the Workers' Owned Sewing Company can feel the 95-degree heat of August days in Windsor, North Carolina. Six had not always been the hour the day shift began, but the Workers' Owned factory has no air conditioning. So, at the beginning of the summer, the board of directors "called a meeting" at which the workers voted to start their day early in order to finish when the heat of the day became unbearable.

Ten a.m. Fifty women sit at their machines, sewing pieces of cloth into finished garments. Longtime civil-rights activist and chairman of the board Tim Bazemore, one of two men who work here fulltime, is nowhere to be seen, although he often spends over 12 hours each day at the factory. This morning, Bazemore took a bit of time from WOSC to sell his hogs.

Although at first glance WOSC gives the physical appearance of an old-fashioned sweat shop, it is not. The machines are lined up in four rows for production, but no assembly-line demands make workers keep up to pace; no one has yet been fired, for working too slowly or for any cause. When one woman continually overstated her production, she was not fired; instead Bazemore and the workers' board talked with her about the problem. They also discussed the issue in general terms with all the workers, and gradually the woman improved her behavior. Unlike the other factories where these women have worked, permission is not needed for a quick trip to the bathroom or to the water fountain.

A few standard grievances do exist, due mainly to the new company's lack of money, and workers express these grievances over and over. Besides the basic complaint about the heat, the workers ask: Why is there no place to make a private call? When are we getting insurance? When will we be able to get paid holidays? Other questions apply specifically to the coop: Why don't we have our business meetings at 11:30 so we don't have to stay after work? When will we get a share and how often? And some questions show a concern for their company: Why do we sit near the window with

the curtain tied back; it looks bad from the outside for a place of business.

Despite a general lack of explicit verbal expressions of the differences between a worker coop and a standard corporation, most people treat WOSC as a special place. Almost all plan to buy a share of stock eventually. "It's something we started ourselves. We're proud," says one board member, and Maggie Cherry adds, "If it comes to working Saturdays and Sundays we do that, too." A worker who joined the coop in March when she lost her transportation to another job now prefers WOSC: "It's a worker-owned cooperative so you get a chance to help make decisions. . . . You watch the company as it grows; you're part of it." Helen White, who comprises the one-person personnel committee to process grievances, thinks, "Most of us work very hard" because of worker ownership. "[The difference] is that people here are supposed to be part owners."

The story of the Workers' Owned Sewing Company really began with the local schools. In the early '60s, Tim Bazemore and other black farmers and small businessmen began to push for a new black school, one with running water and other advantages of the white school. "My children were involved in those schools," says Bazemore, "and I owed it to them as well as to the community." After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the group changed its goal to integration of the schools.

Three years later the schools remained segregated. In the backlash, no white would allow Bazemore, a farmer and pulpwood cutter, to rent land or cut wood on their land. So blacks organized a "withdrawal": a boycott of downtown businesses led by Bazemore, with the assistance of activists from other parts of the South, including the staff of the Highlander Center in Tennessee and John Salter, Jr., of the Southern Conference Education Fund. When business came to a standstill, the demands, which included access to local jobs for blacks as well as in-

tegrated schools, were met.* That boycott, Bazemore now says, "had more impact on the black community than anything else that happened to this day."

But even though local jobs were opened to blacks, the lack of industry meant few jobs were available. Decades of hostility to industry of any sort by a few rich landowners left Bertie County, home of WOSC, with little industry at all. One of the 10 poorest counties in the United States, Bertie County in 1970 had a *per capita* income of \$1,550, under half that for the U.S. The average weekly manufacturing wage in 1979 — \$152.87 — was only about three-fourths that for North Carolina, the state with the lowest manufacturing wage in the nation. As one local minister commented recently, "The plantation philosophy was, if you have competition, you can't get cheap labor." Even minimum-wage factory work posed a threat to the landowners' access to a cheap workforce, but with the increasing mechanization of agriculture, this attitude has mellowed in recent years.

The idea for a black community-owned company to provide employment first appeared during the school crisis of the early '60s. Initial plans called for opening a laundromat since the only one in town served whites-only. After several years of meetings and raising funds, the concept changed to starting a cut-and-sew factory (cutting finished cloth to patterns, sewing the cloth into garments). With \$21,025 raised largely by selling 841 shares at \$25 each to the black community, Bertie Industries opened in 1966. By 1975, the book value of each \$25 share of BI stock reached \$229, and before-tax-profits remained steadily over \$100,000 per year. With 120 workers and its own building, Bertie Industries became the sixth largest employer in the county.

Naturally, the road to success was

* Today, Bertie County still comes in almost at the bottom of North Carolina counties in local funds spent per student, and only a fifth of adult males complete high school. White landowners led the forces that successfully defeated a \$4 million school bond issue in 1979.

rocky. Whites in the county didn't fight BI simply because they believed blacks *couldn't* succeed, and the lack of capital did nearly kill the factory in its first year. High training costs for workers — virtually none had previous experience in any factory work — and low prices on contracts almost doomed the company in 1967. The black community then formed the Bertie Boosters Club which, with the Windsor Merchants' Association, raised \$6,000 to get BI more firmly on its feet, and by the end of 1968 Bertie Industries showed a profit. The next year, at the behest of local Republican politicians, Bertie Industries got a quick, almost-unasked-for injection of money from the Small Business Administration, which saw BI as a potential model of black capitalism.

The Nixon Administration considered the SBA 8(a) program to be the key to the success of black capitalism. Under 8(a), minority-owned businesses received contracts at subsidized rates until the company could compete on its own in the free market. In theory, 8(a) would provide the opportunity to overcome the handicaps of lack of capital and lack of expertise. The fall of BI from before-tax profits of \$100,000 in 1975 to a loss of \$161,000 in 1978, the year the program ended for BI, illustrates the total failure of 8(a).

Under 8(a), the Small Business Administration sent in managers, almost always white, who would run the company, supposedly teaching the real owners how to conduct a respectable business. In practice, however, these managers had no incentive either to train the real owners or to run the company well. Moreover, to participate in 8(a) the BI board of directors had to turn over almost total control to SBA and its appointed managers. In one case — not an isolated instance — SBA insisted BI award a contract to a relative of a government official rather than to the lowest bidder. Bazemore asserts that the board of directors asked to have black managers trained, but SBA "did not allow a black to be trained under the white management. . . . We were not allowed to really be involved in the day-to-day operation." To Bazemore, the fact that "the board of



Timothy Bazemore

directors of the black community was not really involved” — a lack not totally the fault of SBA — was “one of the greatest factors that caused [BI] to fail.” In addition, the white managers had little interest in or understanding of the goals and history of BI, to the extent that, according to Bazemore, “Bertie Industries would not hire people who were involved in” the boycott.

When the SBA connection ended in 1976, BI had been stuck with a large government contract to produce camouflage jackets at a price so low as to guarantee a loss, a contract arranged by an SBA-appointed manager who disappeared, never to be heard from again. Eventually, Bertie Industries lost a quarter of a million dollars on the contract, and over the next two years BI opened and closed a few times as Bazemore took over as manager and attempted to save the company. But he lacked any experience running a cut-and-sew business, and the debts proved insurmountable even though small profits appeared before BI finally closed its doors in 1978.

In one reopened phase during 1978, Bertie Industries’ board members were presented with an idea: start a new company that would be owned and managed by the workers. The Workers’ Owned Sewing Company was the brainchild of Frank Adams, an activist from nearby Gates County who has long been involved in civil rights and other struggles in the area and around the South. Board member Willie Riddick, who had worked with Adams in the Gates County Assembly, a grass-roots, multi-issue political action group (see *Southern Exposure*, Vol. VII, No. 1), brought him in to help save BI.

“At that time,” recalls Adams, “I was running a shoe repair shop which I was using as a center for social change in Gatesville. . . . Some people came over from Bertie County and wanted to know if I’d come over. They had also heard, and perhaps correctly, that I had a lot of contacts with not only money people but people with technical skills who were willing to put those skills to the service of people.”

Adams put together the Workers’

Ownership Technical Assistance Group, composed of himself and several professors from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and financed by the Youth Project and the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation. Although the TAG did investigate the ability of BI to survive, its main purpose was to develop a plan for transition to some form of worker ownership and/or worker control.

After first learning the basics of the cut-and-sew business themselves, the TAG made a semblance of order out of the business records of BI and proved to the board that the more business the company did, the more deeply they fell into debt. At least two board members — Bazemore and Riddick — increasingly became convinced that worker ownership was the path to take. The board as a whole still wanted to save the company, but before any of the TAG's recommendations of ways to revive or transform BI could be enacted, creditors forced the demise of Bertie Industries.

Convincing the workers that workers' ownership would be good for them was even more difficult than convincing the board, and that task has yet to be completed. For 13 years, Bertie Industries provided jobs for black and white people and stood as a source of pride for the black community especially. But the chaos of BI's last years — the payless paydays, the periodic closings, the decline of community involvement, the widespread nepotism — left a legacy of distrust that would be a major hurdle for any new experiment.

Compounding the problem, in the final days of BI's existence, the TAG (except for Adams) had had practically no contact with the workers, who were naturally suspicious of these white men from Chapel Hill. The only substantive meeting between the TAG and the workers came at the end of the study when its results were presented. TAG member Ed Bergman, a city planner with experience studying and advising several worker ownership projects, recalls that day. The workers expected the meeting to be another announcement of a payless payday, the reason for previous worker meetings. (One such day had occurred the day the TAG first ar-

rived.) After the TAG's presentation of the conditions they had found at BI, "They [the workers] were truly perplexed." Bergman believes that the workers received the plans with much skepticism and misunderstanding. As in subsequent meetings between outside advisors and the workers as a group, the workers remained almost totally silent. However, a committee of 10 workers was selected to discuss and help plan the transition. Adams later described the activities of that committee:

We had regular meetings. They stayed two or three hours after work and they talked with Steve Dawson [a consultant who had also worked with the Assemblies], they talked with Diana Wilson [of the Youth Project, a funding agency]. They talked with Ed Bergman and they made proposals like asking people to work for no pay in order to keep a new firm going and things like that. In general, they discussed the subtleties of worker ownership and worker management and three of the people that were elected to that transition committee are on the board [of the Workers' Owned Sewing Company] now.

With the help not only of Frank Adams, but also of the Industrial Cooperative Association [ICA], a group of Massachusetts-based consultants, a set of by-laws for a worker-owned corporation was written. In August, 1979, Tim Bazemore purchased the first share of stock. Under the by-laws, WOSC opened with Bazemore holding a majority of stock, with total control to be transferred to the workers gradually over the next three years.

Like Bertie Industries, WOSC lacks both sufficient capital and sufficient equipment. Standard business loans are unavailable to the worker coop, and Bazemore used up most of the personal savings he had amassed as a farmer and woodcutter in the effort to save BI. The initial capitalization of WOSC was a little money from Bazemore, plus a \$3,000 low-interest loan arranged by ICA. A \$15,000 loan in November helped the company buy

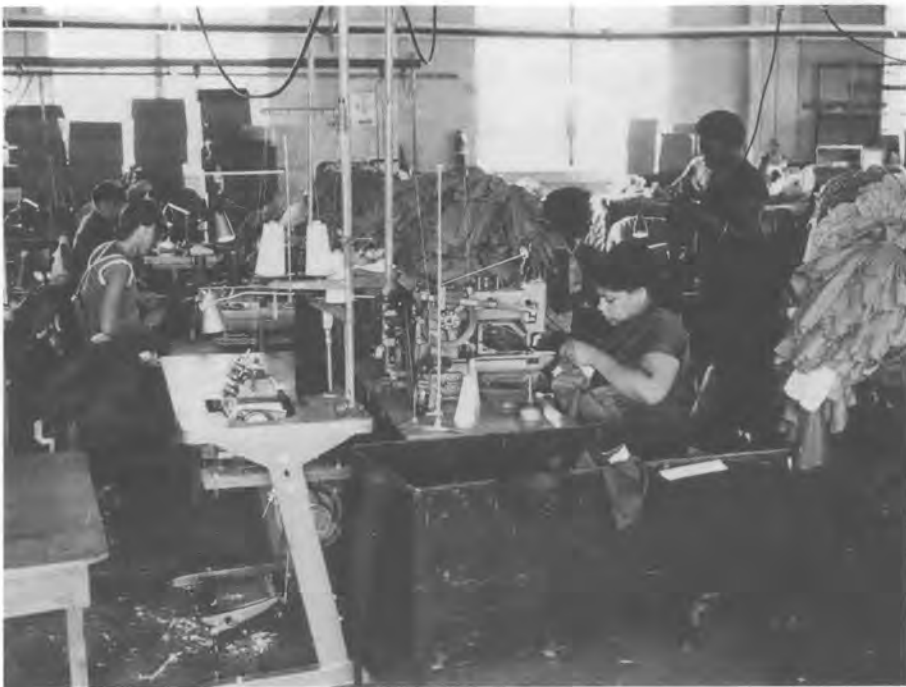
machines and employ enough people to reach the break-even point, but not enough to bring in experienced managers. (Half of that loan has already been repaid, and payments are six months ahead of schedule.)

How WOSC met its first payrolls illustrates the tightness of money at the company . . . and how starting a workers' coop in Bertie County is unique. At the last minute Tim Bazemore, with the help of friends and neighbors, sold his corn crop on Thursday to raise the cash for Friday's pay. This *ad hoc* arrangement continued for several weeks. "Tim got the first money, literally," says Adams, "with his corn crop, his soy beans and his hogs. And when the next crisis came, ICA and I got the money" in November.

WOSC has faced some opposition — some outright — from blacks in Bertie County, arising in part from personal rivalries between Bazemore and other BI board members who express a desire to reopen BI. Although nothing has come of this, the workers and others involved with WOSC sorely want that BI building for themselves: not only is it air-conditioned, but it is much larger than the current WOSC building.* And some people continue to be bitter at Bazemore because, in the closing days of BI, he was forced to fire some people.

On the other hand, "Many of the whites have been supportive," says Bazemore. "The mayor has been extremely helpful," and one white man offered to loan the company \$8,000. But this support from the white community is not universal, and trouble from the Southern Bank and Trust Company almost resulted in WOSC following BI to the graveyard.

* WOSC tried for a major loan of \$150,000 from the new National Coop Bank in order to purchase the BI building. In a sense, this loan application can be seen as a test of the new coop bank, which considers itself a partisan of the coop movement. All early loans from the bank, however, went to established and stable coops, those that needed loans more for special projects than for survival. Grass-roots and shaky coops — such as a coop of working-class blacks in Bertie County — have yet to benefit. But the building was sold to someone else before the bank could make a decision.



When it appeared that WOSC might succeed, says Bazemore, "Everything I had come due yesterday;" the bank foreclosed on personal loans to Bazemore, thereby threatening to kill WOSC. The relevant officer of the bank also chairs the local chamber of commerce. The death of WOSC would have freed up a workforce for a new company that local businessmen apparently hope to open in the BI building, now vacant. The day before the loan had to be repaid, Frank Adams and ICA arranged another loan to get the needed \$11,000.

These were not the only financial crises: in January, 1980, the company found itself \$9,000 short of being able to pay quarterly payroll taxes. At the same time, Opportunity Funding Corporation (only one of many groups that supporters of WOSC say don't understand the problem) rejected an application for a long-term loan. Next, the WOSC application for CETA funding was denied, after assurances that it would be approved. Then the SBA office in Charlotte, North Carolina, delayed processing an application to admit WOSC into the 8(a) program. The application was eventually turned down because of the unusual structure of the company as a worker coop and because the company was undercapitalized.

Despite these multiple setbacks, by spring of 1980 Bazemore and Adams both expected WOSC to succeed. In part, the Workers' Owned Sewing Company derived some benefit from the legacy of BI — learning from both its mistakes and its positive contributions. Almost all the workers at WOSC previously worked at BI, making them experienced cut-and-sew operators. Further, a significant minority of the workers at WOSC had owned shares at BI, making them more cautious about the company's financial risks, but also more aware of what owning stock can mean and can demand. A share of BI stock carried no voting rights; at WOSC, each worker will eventually have to buy, after a six-month trial period, one and only one share of stock under the principle of one-person-one-vote.

Lastly, for all its faults, BI set a precedent of decent working conditions. Almost all see a big difference

between WOSC or BI and other local industries such as Perdue, a \$9.6 million chicken processing plant built in nearby Lewiston in 1976, described by one WOSC board member as "just simply a prison."

But the factor that will make the difference between success and failure (and which accounts for Bazemore's and Adams' optimism) is the concept of worker ownership and control. That concept has drawn to Bertie County the interest and support of several foundations and the crucial expertise of several consultants, all of whom recognize in the WOSC — a rural, black-worker-owned coop — an experiment with wide potential impact. The foundations, of course, provided the initial capital in the form of loans and grants, which would otherwise have been unavailable to blacks attempting to start businesses in Windsor and which got WOSC over several financial humps.

The foundation money also supports the participation of consultants which, although not without negative effects, brings much-needed expertise and personal support. The TAG helped only in the transition, but the Industrial Cooperative Association has been providing educational, management and financial assistance for two years. The connection between ICA and WOSC grows in part out of the involvement of ICA project coordinator Steve Dawson in the Assemblies, where he first worked with Riddick and Adams. Joseph Fox, a business analyst from ICA who travels to Windsor every two months, has helped WOSC both to judge accurately how well the company is doing and to do computer projections for the next three years under a variety of circumstances. A current application to SBA for participation in 8(a) was prepared and submitted by ICA.

To make worker control a reality, to realize both its economic and human potential, requires education, and this has been Frank Adams' task. Adams describes his assignment, which began in the BI period, as the "development of an understanding of the democratic process and democratic decision-making." In short, he teaches the workers how to be managers and, conversely, teaches the present man-

agers — Bazemore and the board — how to let worker control become a reality. For several months, Adams held "school" for workers and managers over weekly pot-luck lunches around the wood stove that provided the only (vastly insufficient) heat for the factory in winter. Most workers recall those meetings fondly. Instead of lecturing, Adams attempted to lead the workers to understand what worker ownership meant:

The reality that I faced as a teacher in this process was an enormous hostility toward the idea of a cooperative because of the history of Bertie Industries and the Poor People's Coop [another attempt at community cooperation in Bertie which, in many people's eyes, failed.] In order to develop an educational process which reinforced their willingness to learn about workers' ownership and participate in it, we had to structure an educational process which reinforced the good things which happened to them, and make sure good things did happen to them.

Most of the discussions centered on production, while more politically oriented issues are faced as they arise. For example, "The process [of electing the worker board of directors] was very, very important," says Adams.

A big deal was made of that. . . . We started the process by helping them learn how to organize and hold an election. . . . When I see they can't form a committee to hold an election, that's when I begin working with a group of people. I start working with them by raising questions about how you go about electing people in your church. I try to relate the process as much to their previous experience as possible. And it's simply a matter of setting them in motion so they can learn by doing in the context of doing it on the shop floor.

Adams' approach does have one drawback: although there is a small

core who today can discuss worker ownership, only a few workers explicitly understand that the name of *their* company has any special meaning. When asked how long they've worked at WOSC, all include their years at BI. And, unfortunately, the potlucks were suspended, partly due to business ups and downs, partly due to the heat of the summer, and partly because Adams believes that that phase of his task as teacher has largely been completed, that the workers must educate themselves from now on.

The basis of Adams' positive assessment, and the focus of much of his contribution, is the board of directors. Although the by-laws provided for Bazemore to appoint a majority of the board for the first year, he allowed the workers to elect the entire board from the outset. The current board — Bazemore and workers Lila Dudley, Celia Cherry, Maggie Cherry (no relation) and Louise White — do have a deep understanding of the company and the collective process born of a hard year of experience. The most dramatic display of this understanding occurred in June when the board voted unanimously, *except* for Bazemore, that it was time to sell shares in WOSC to the workers: they overruled Bazemore's caution and saw the necessity of making worker ownership a reality even while the venture seemed risky. In late September, this mandate finally was put in action, and by October, 47 of the 60 workers were buying a \$100 share through a payroll deduction of \$2 to \$5 per week.

The board, like the workers, still has much to learn. While the board is informed on all matters relating to the company — they discuss the state of grants and loans, Fox explains the business plans, Bazemore and Adams report on projects to buy the BI building — in actuality it appears to simply approve, or in rare cases disapprove, of actions taken by Bazemore. In this they usually function much as a standard corporate board of directors, voting on proposals put forth by managers, but taking no initiatives in management itself, such as seeking out contracts, talking to job applicants before Bazemore does, selecting supervisors. All the board members agree with Lila Dudley



that “you need a manager” and always will.

But, as Joseph Fox, who hopes to complete his role as business advisor soon and begin helping Adams with continuing educational work, points out, in Bertie County every advance is made against immense odds. “I learned to be very excited just by the small changes in people’s ability to grasp just one more piece to make their business run.”

Today, the balance sheet of the Workers’ Owned Sewing Company, if not that of General Motors, is better than that of Chrysler. The company recorded its first monthly profit in May, 1980, only eight months after opening. Sales now run at a comfortably steady \$35,000 per month, and worker productivity, by standards in the cut-and-sew industry, has risen from dismal to respectable. From 25 employees in the fall of 1979, the coop grew to 56 in August, 1980, with 100 projected for May, 1981, with three employees to be added each month. The business plan prepared by Fox projects annual sales of \$2 million and an annual profit of \$134,000 within two years, even without 8(a) or additional grants or loans.

No payless paydays have occurred at WOSC, avoiding perhaps the chief bitterness in the days of BI. In fact, the coop’s first large, steady contract — from K-Mart in the summer of 1980 — means a few workers have become practiced enough working on a single pattern to earn incentive pay to go with the base pay of \$3.10 per hour (the minimum wage).

Outside Bertie County and eastern North Carolina \$3.10 per hour sounds pretty poor for a worker-owned coop, especially since the stock may never bring great financial dividends. But in Bertie County, with few industrial jobs existing, especially for women, and given the national standard for cut-and-sew, the pay at WOSC is a welcome contrast to unemployment or low-paid seasonal farmwork. Bazemore is not joking or exaggerating when he says that “At minimum wage, we’re average.”

Worker ownership is seen as the key to survival for the company after the

consultants leave. The cut-and-sew industry is highly competitive, with fixed costs in almost all operations. The only way to compete is to be more efficient, and practically all studies agree that productivity increases with worker control. In the first place, costs for supervisors are kept to a minimum: supervisors at WOSC mainly coordinate, and never discipline; when a machine is free, they often join the other workers sewing garments since no one is bound by job descriptions.

More important, when the workers own the company, when they feel in control of the company, they obviously have a greater incentive to do good work. While much education remains to be done, the seeds of cooperation always existed. Several people donated a few weeks of their time before WOSC opened in order to make the warehouse space clean and usable. As one worker said when WOSC approached its first birthday, "Everybody here's trying to make money for the company. . . . I find myself more interested in the quality since I'm working in a workers' coop. . . . You care." Says board member Louise White, "I feel like I'm doing it for myself." And the other board members all agree.

The real advantages of WOSC, however — the real difference between working for Blue Bell Corporation in nearby Robersonville and working at WOSC — lie in the conditions of work, in the *power* of the members to control their own working lives. Almost all the employees of WOSC say nothing negative and much that is positive about the company they will come to own. "Here it feels just like I'm working at home," says board member Maggie Cherry. Other opinions range from "I like the people" to "It's easier" than work at Blue Bell to "more relaxed, less pressured." A few workers voice negative feelings, such as "It's a big difference [from the shoe company]. The shoe company was better," or "You don't want to ask." (This last comment came from a person "ordered" to WOSC by the Employment Security Commission. The ESC on the whole refuses to send experienced workers to WOSC. "They direct them to all over hell," says

Adams, "rather than direct them to Workers' Owned.")

The low turnover at WOSC reflects in part the lack of other options in the county, but also a significant degree of worker loyalty and contentment with the work. What seems to set WOSC and its predecessor BI apart from other companies is not the abstract idea of worker ownership but its effect: the lack of pressure, especially from plant supervisors. At WOSC the supervisors are so well integrated into the workforce that no one expresses any of the customary resentment towards them. Few people seem to grudge them their slightly higher salary of \$150 per week or their privileged parking spaces. Supervisors decide who will work which contracts — a potential source of antagonism since most everyone wants to work on the K-Mart contract with its greater potential for earning incentive pay — but they never ride herd on the workers. Assignments are rotated so that more workers can benefit from the good contracts. Workers who can't give a precise definition of worker ownership are well aware of the differences between WOSC supervisors and those elsewhere: "The supervisors are different because they're not pushy." "There's nobody on my back."

One of the great achievements at WOSC has been the positive way blacks and whites work together. About three-fourths of the workers are black, and the board has ranged from about 50-50 to its present 80 percent black. The idea that the future of the company depends on the workers appears to be the force creating cooperation. Again, the board members speak most eloquently. Louise White (white): "One big family, that's all. . . . My kids are just like I am. If you cut your finger, it'll bleed just like mine." Or Lila Dudley (black): "We don't even think about color. We think about people. We couldn't make it if there were discrimination. We have learned to deal with people not color. That's one of the reasons we're going to make it." One white ex-employee was widely considered to be a racist when she started at WOSC, but, says Dudley, "She was much different when she left. . . . She had it in her heart, but she held it in real good."

For all the potential for an egalitarian workers' coop in the future, WOSC does operate with a hierarchy today. At the top of the pyramid sits Tim Bazemore, one of two full-time male employees; the other is the mechanic. The mechanic's higher pay reflects the pay rate demanded for the job. Bazemore's higher pay grows out of his role as manager, and out of his personal financial and emotional commitment to WOSC, plus the 10 weeks he put in without pay when the company began. Besides being paid more, workers view Bazemore as the boss, although the board does recognize and act on its ability to overrule him.

The unanimous view of Bazemore as boss may be WOSC's biggest problem for the future. As one satisfied employee, with six years of experience at BI, phrases it, "I'll stay as long as he lets me." Or, on a lighter note, one board member recalled that Bazemore (Mr. Bazemore to the workers and to the board) promised the workers watermelon and ice cream during the summer, a promise never fulfilled.

The fact that all outside consultants are white males — Frank Adams, Joseph Fox, Steve Dawson, Mike Miles, Mike Redmond, Rick Carlisle, Ed Bergman — certainly reinforces the male dominance at WOSC. Even the few part-time men at WOSC strengthen the pattern, since they usually do specific tasks, such as cutting or pressing.

Smaller points add to the hierarchy. The assigned parking spaces for supervisors are excused as necessary because the supervisors have to sometimes take a person to the hospital, but why does a supervisor have to take care of such a task? More important, two board members are also supervisors, carrying a suggestion of potential for misuse of board member power, although no signs of that exist now.

Lastly, neither the board nor Bazemore believe that the workers are ready to know the financial state of the Workers' Owned Sewing Company. The workers did not know the company lost money most months, and therefore didn't know when the first profits appeared or how welcome a \$60,000 loan from the Presbyterian Church was. Certainly, no one had the opportunity for collective rejoicing at these positive signs,

just as they have not been able to learn, as a group, the extent of the trials of establishing *their* coop. The reason for keeping the workers in the dark lies in the bitter memories of Bertie Industries' financial woes, leading Bazemore and Fox and Adams to insist that keeping workers' confidence is more crucial at this point than education on cooperative management. They are probably right, but the ramifications of protecting the members of a worker coop from full knowledge of their own company may not be easy to overcome.

Just as the problem of hierarchies, unmentioned at WOSC today, will inevitably surface, so too will the question of labor unions. In fact, one of the nails in the coffin of BI came when that company unknowingly got a subcontract — later blocked by the courts — from a Northern company being struck by a textile union. Even without experiences such as that, unions show a great reluctance to support, and sometimes even show hostility towards, worker coops. Says Jerry Wurf, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, "The concept of workers' control is an exciting one for soapbox oratory in the streets and rap sessions in the faculty lounge. It's just not realistic to talk about under the social, political and economic system in this country."*

People at WOSC today see no role for a union in their factory. While one board member could visualize a need for a union if WOSC grew larger, all supported Lila Dudley's belief that "If the company profits, the people profit, so they don't need a union." One worker who "didn't know much about a coop when I came here," and wanted a union in her previous job, says "There's no need for it [at WOSC]. A union's to protect you, right? . . . A board you elect is going to look out for your welfare and your well-being. . . . A union is somewhat the same thing."

Logically, the people at WOSC are correct. But on August 25, 1980, the 500 employees of South Bend Lathe, Inc., a 100 percent employee-owned

company in Indiana, went on strike, apparently against themselves. They struck because, although they owned the company, they had no say in management. The structure, size and history of WOSC are quite different from those of South Bend Lathe, and great effort at cooperative education is made at WOSC to ensure that work-

er management goes hand-in-hand with worker ownership in Bertie County. But the potential for conflict is obvious in the existing hierarchies, in a lack of worker awareness of the existence of their board left alone its role, and in the lack of board or worker involvement in the day-to-day management. Further, events in Poland in the

owners in name only

Worker self-management eventually follows worker ownership. This often unstated assumption hinges on the notion that workers will automatically control long-established capitalistic systems of production, labor-management relations, marketing and finance once they control ownership rights in a company. But is this true?

Consider the case of South Bend Lathe, a 100-percent worker-owned company since 1975. In the fall of 1980, the media reported a modern paradox: worker-owners at South Bend had gone on strike against themselves. Back in 1974, when the recession hit the machine tool industries especially hard, Amsted Industries decided to sell South Bend Lathe. In an effort to avert a total shutdown and save 500 jobs, city and federal officials worked closely with SBL's division president to reorganize the company under the ownership of an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). To implement this plan and take advantage of favorable tax provisions, workers agreed to forfeit their United Steelworkers' pension plan and to accept ownership of stock held in a pension trust. They couldn't directly elect the Board of Directors (the president appoints them) which in turn appoints the ESOP committee that votes the workers' stock. Although worker productivity and plant profitability quickly rose, workers began to voice their dissatisfaction with the lack

of self-management opportunities. One worker summarized the reasons they eventually went out on strike:

We've bent over backwards since 1975 to make a good product and keep it selling. . . . We've kept our mouths shut, covered up differences with management to avoid bad publicity. . . . But all we got was the same treatment we had before the ESOP, maybe even worse. We make no decisions. We have no voice. We're owners in name only.

Then there's the example of the American Cast Iron Pipe Company (ACIPCO), which has been an employee-owned firm in Birmingham, Alabama, since 1924. The company, formed in 1905 by John Eagan, a Christian philanthropist, was operated under a traditional corporate structure until 1921. At that point Eagan introduced a new organizational plan for the 2,300-employee firm that gave white workers (a minority of total employees) the right to elect and serve on a Board of Operatives (10 worker representatives), two members of which were in turn elected to sit on the Board of Directors. At Eagan's death in 1924, all the stock in the company was transferred to an employees' trust created by the "Eagan Plan." Under this plan, a Board of Management (officers in the corporation), remained "first among equals" with a controlling voice in the trust and the company's daily operations.

The tangible advantages to workers over the last 56 years of employee ownership have come in the form of medical and pension benefits, periodic profit-sharing and wages competitive with other firms in the area. The company now employs 3,000 workers and remains at the top of technological and production advances in the pipe and hydrant industry, making it an important Birmingham employer and a worthwhile reference point for those studying employee equity par-

* Quoted in Daniel Zwerdling, *Democracy at Work*, available for \$5.00 plus \$.50 postage from Association for Self-Management, c/o 1414 Spring Rd., NW, Washington, DC 20010.

summer of 1980 showed that even when an entire nation expresses worker control as official policy, unions are necessary as a counterforce to the potential to abuse that ideology. Even the probable success of WOSC, affecting perhaps a hundred families, would not in itself prove Wurf wrong, prove that worker control can succeed

on a wide scale in the U.S.

In Bertie County today, these potential hurdles seem beside the point. The immediate *raison d'être*, after all, of both Bertie Industries and the Workers' Owned Sewing Company was to create jobs in one county. Tim Bazemore and the

participation.

The original Eagan plan did not envision worker self-management; it entitled workers to elect a Board of Operatives to represent their interests, and it granted worker representatives the right to inspect company books and participate in the functioning of the Board of Directors. But members of the Board of Operatives indicate that there has been no serious attempt to take advantage of the original opportunities to influence management decisions, to gain access to financial information, or even to find out the salaries and profit-sharing bonuses paid to management. More recently, several workers who have tried to obtain such information as management salary figures have been frustrated by the resistance of management; they further acknowledge their own inability to force access to, and then understand, the sophisticated systems of accounting and production control.

One reason for ACIPCO workers' failure to take full advantage of their legal rights is a long history of industrial relations that includes white worker domination of high-paying jobs and strong racial divisiveness among a workforce that is presently 40 percent black. The fragmentation of workers along racial and seniority lines, until very recently, produced a divided (and passive) Board of Operatives that never disagreed with management on fundamental operational decisions.

Current worker interest in expanding self-management at ACIPCO stems from the civil-rights movement of the 1960s. Black workers organized an Equal Employment Opportunity Committee and brought a Title VII action to enforce their rights. In 1963 two-thirds of the ACIPCO employees were black, but only one white employee made less than the highest paid black. Moreover, blacks could not serve on the Board of Operatives (they were represented *ex-officio* by the "Colored

YMCA.") The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals remedy changed the hiring, promotion and wage structure at ACPCO and removed the barrier to black participation on the Board of Operatives — the only significant change in the Eagan plan since 1924.

Preparation for the Title VII litigation aroused the interest of many black employees in expanding the rights of workers and their influence on management decisions. Several blacks have served on the Board of Operatives in the last six years, and they have been determined to widen its role. While the initial Title VII remedy further split the workforce along racial lines, white votes for black representatives to the Board of Operatives suggest the emergence of worker solidarity in their battle to obtain greater self-management rights.

The ACIPCO and South Bend Lathe experiences illustrate that ownership by employees is by no means a sufficient guarantee that worker self-management will follow, even after a substantial period of time. Management-initiated or -controlled trusts (the Eagan plan, ESOPs) do not allow workers any direct influence on management decisions. Therefore, the most important initial factor in determining the potential for self-management is the initial corporate structure. In the absence of such provisions, workers quite logically become frustrated with ownership alone and they revert to traditional methods of redressing grievances — through unions, where they exist, or through the courts.

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board members and other employees see 60 people gainfully employed in a far more humane structure and environment than most people would think possible in a region where plantation landowners still retain effective control of local politics and economics. A significant number of those 60 people take pride in being part owners of their place of employment. They have succeeded, for the most part, in escaping the negative parts of the legacy of Bertie Industries, slowly gaining the trust of the black community and establishing the faith that WOSC will live. There have been problems along the way, and a great need exists for constant attention to education, but a solid foundation has been laid.

"We've got a long way to go," says Lila Dudley, "but we're going." In August, 1980, Dudley was honored by her church, one of the most influential in Bertie County, for her role in the Workers' Owned Sewing Company. And now that workers are buying shares, they are also investing in and becoming aware of the nature of worker control. The workers who own shares, as would be expected, also appear to understand best what the Workers' Owned Sewing Company is all about.

Meanwhile, as advocates of worker coops predict, the idea of economic democracy is slowly spreading. Tim Bazemore, with the prodding encouragement of Frank Adams, has become a spokesperson for worker ownership in the state and eventually plans, when his presence at WOSC is no longer needed, to return to his true vocation, timber cutting, and set up a worker coop in that business. And 70 miles away, in New Bern, North Carolina, 250 people showed up for a meeting in late summer, 1980: Textfi Corporation had announced its intention to close its plant there; these angry workers began to discuss *saving* their jobs by running their plant as a coop. In this they can listen to one Bertie County worker for inspiration: "When you get into something like this, it makes you think about what could be done." □

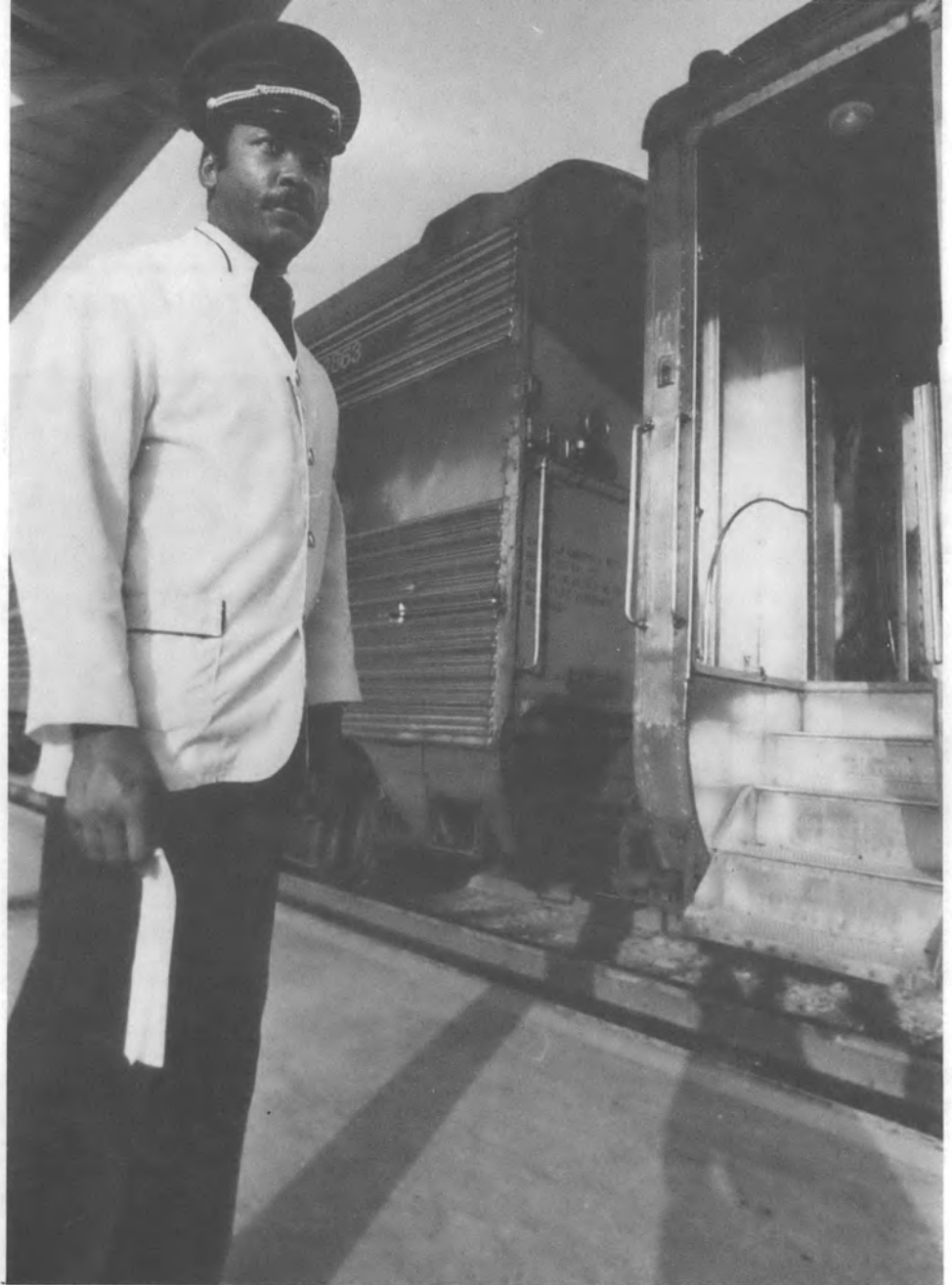
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FACES ALONG THE WAY



Photographs by John Sumner







“Completing the job”

in Forsyth County

C B Hackworth

An incident of interracial rape, lynching and “night riding” in Northeast Georgia shortly after the turn of the century — such an event is depressingly familiar to anyone even superficially acquainted with the place and the period. That Forsyth County in 1912 was the scene of such an occurrence hardly merits individual attention, except for two distinguishing factors: first, due to tremendous recent growth in population and industry, Forsyth today is a major suburb of Atlanta. Second, other than an occasional delivery truck driver or visiting government official, there are currently no black faces anywhere in the county.

Blacks, as slaves, had lived in Forsyth since its settlement in the early 1800s. In 1910, the census still counted 1,098 blacks there — 9.2 percent of the county’s total population. When the 1920 census was taken, however, the number of blacks had diminished to 30 — an almost nonexistent 0.3 percent of the population.

In only one month of the decade between the two censuses Forsyth County and neighboring Dawson County were purged of an entire race. Now, almost 70 years later, a legacy of racism and hatred still governs those counties. The signs are gone which once marked Forsyth’s boundaries with the warning, “NIGGER DON’T LET THE SUN SET ON YOU IN FORSYTH COUNTY.” But their message still carries weight throughout the northern half of the state.

Blacks accidentally entering the county soon encounter overt hostility from a “welcoming committee” of militant whites. Sometimes, the blacks are merely harassed or threatened. Others reportedly are beaten. At least one has been shot in recent months.

Some residents of Forsyth, of course, do not agree with the extreme county-wide segregation — a businessman who works in Atlanta and wishes that he could invite black associates to his home on the lake, a bride whose black friends were afraid to attend her wedding. But these people are a minority, and the challenge of speaking out, they feel, is not worth the risks.

What precipitated the month-long purge — referred to locally as “the war?” Many of the sources for this account are descendants of the white participants; these people still believe that their ancestors were justified in what they did. Most versions begin with the disappearance of an 18-year-old farm girl on Sunday, September 8, 1912, from her home in Oscarville, an obscure community in eastern Forsyth — about halfway between the county seat, Cumming, and Gainesville. But trouble was brewing between the whites and blacks in Forsyth County even before this.

Three days earlier, several black men had been arrested and charged with the attempted assault of a white woman in Cumming. Grant Smith, a black preacher, was severely beaten on the Cumming public square for “allegedly insulting remarks” about the woman. Smith, too, was arrested, but he alone was released. “Likely he will be more careful about what he says about white women in the future,” one newspaper wrote. Another paper reported “threats of lynching, followed by rumors from a Negro picnic and barbecue near town of plots for dynamiting the town in the event any Negroes were lynched.” The atmosphere had become so explosive that, on Saturday, September 7, Georgia Governor Joseph M. Brown rushed two companies of the state militia to Cumming. “NEAR RIOT AT CUMMING” was the headline carried in the Gainesville *News*.

At this critical point, the search for the missing Oscarville girl was initiated. She was found in the woods early the next morning, unconscious and mostly naked, lying in a pool of her own blood — brutally raped, but alive. A small group of black people had the misfortune of being found standing over the abused body.

The girl was treated at the home of Dr. G.P. Brice by Brice and Dr. John Hockenhull. After receiving medical attention, she rested comfortably and was expected to recover. She didn’t, but she did regain consciousness long enough to tell relatives and friends of her ordeal.

She said that on her way to visit an aunt, down a dirt road she had walked many times before without a thought of danger, she encountered Ernest Knox, a 16-year-old black whom she knew. Though newspapers later stated Knox “came upon her suddenly and dragged her into the woods,” the girl’s testimony was that she engaged the boy in conversation, as his presence in that area seemed strange. He soon began making carnal remarks, at which point she told him he should leave before he got into trouble. Knox then attacked her, she said.

Fiercely, and with some success, the girl fought back — until her assailant struck her head repeatedly with a rock. She said she was raped, first by Knox, later by two others — Ed Collins and Oscar Daniel. The trio then enlisted the aid of a large black woman to help in planning their escape, and she, in turn, invited still others to join in the goings on. That night, searchers had passed very near the point in the woods where the girl was being molested and might have seen the glow of a kerosene lamp, but the black woman covered it with the hem of her skirt.

Knox, Daniel and several others were arrested immediately. When the raped girl’s story became known, “wild rumors of lynching” circulated, and the prisoners were moved to the Hall County jail. A “considerable crowd” headed for the jail Monday night, arriving about an hour after the accused had been spirited away once more, this

time to relative safety in a Fulton County facility. "As soon as they became satisfied that [Knox] was gone," a newspaper related, "they quietly dispersed and no further talk of trouble was heard."

But that was true only because people were tired of talking. Ed Collins was apprehended Tuesday morning. An account of his fate appeared in Wednesday's *Gainesville News*: "[He] was taken from the jail at Cumming yesterday afternoon and killed, after which his body was strung up to a telephone post in the heart of town, by a mob of infuriated citizens. The sheriff had arrested the Negro yesterday and carried him to jail. Not long after, several hundred men gathered around the jail and finally broke into it. Collins was mutilated with a crowbar, a rope placed around his neck, his body dragged through town and strung up as above mentioned. After this was done the citizens quietly dispersed and no more trouble is anticipated."

According to general accounts, the newspapers failed to report a second lynching. The fat black woman described by the rape victim was taken from her cabin, apparently without a struggle. In an unspecified spot, she was tied and staked to the ground, while several white men delivered speeches about "God's will." They placed a stick of dynamite between her legs and lit the fuse.

Thirteen militia men had been left in Forsyth County when the other prisoners were smuggled to prisons in Hall and Fulton. Their whereabouts during the lynchings are unknown.

Beneath the account of Ed Collins' murder, the *Gainesville News* published this short editorial: "It appears that Forsyth County is having all its troubles at one time. Two criminal assaults in less than one week wrought up the people to a high pitch. They controlled themselves with remarkable self-restraint."

Meanwhile, the girl's condition grew progressively worse, and she died September 23. In romanticized versions, she lost the will to live the moment the rock struck her brow. Her deathbed wish, as reported by her relatives, was for the guilty to be punished.

The fates of Daniel and Knox were already sealed. Three companies of militia accompanied the two to Cumming, where their trial, on October 3, concluded with a guilty verdict and a hanging sentence set for October 25. Summarizing the outcome, the *Dahlonega Nugget* reported: "Jane Daniel, whose testimony convicted her brother and Knox, has been set free as well as one of the men who was arrested to be held as a witness. The fifth was given a 20-year sentence in the chain gang, and the sixth was lynched and has gone to hell."

The *Gainesville News* carried a message from the governor: "Governor Brown expressed great gratification over the conduct of the military at Cumming, and he also said he felt very proud of the citizens of Forsyth County for their forbearance and bowing to the law in most trying conditions."

But most white Forsyth Countians had already turned their attention to larger issues. The "war" had begun. Nearly all the white men, heavily armed, had disappeared several days before the trial. Their fear-stricken families had deserted their homes and were hiding in the hills. One sentence in the *Dahlonega Nugget* hinted at the grim plight of the area's black families: "Many of the Negroes have left

drawing by Pat Ford



the county for fear of getting into trouble.”

Actually, the white men were beginning the systematic elimination of every black in the county. “The conduct of those Negroes in Forsyth County,” said the *Dahlonge Nugget*, “has caused the organization of White Caps, who have notified the blacks to move out, and where they acted slow about it their homes were destroyed or damaged. A Negro church was burned to the ground.

“Persons returning from Dawson this week inform us that the situation is much worse in that county. A colored church has also been burned to the ground in that county, together with several Negro houses. One white man’s gin houses were badly damaged because he didn’t dismiss his Negro renters when notified. All the Negroes in the county have been notified to leave at once and they are going to.”

Another account read, “At one Negro house the White Caps, upon failing to find anyone at home, caught the Negro’s cow, tied it in the yard and after piling a lot of wood around the animal burnt it to death. At least 500 bullets were shot into some of the doors and walls of Negro houses one night last week, on account of the inmates not leaving out promptly as directed. Fortunately for them they were not there then. The situation is also troubling some of the farmers who have much land to rent and no one to take it.”

The marauding spread to surrounding counties as well, but white resistance was greater outside Forsyth and Dawson. In Gainesville, on October 10, a large crowd gathered downtown and proceeded to a building being constructed near City Hall by M.A. Gaines. With threats, they ordered the black brickmasons to quit work. An outraged Gaines pressed charges, and five white men were arrested. Two nights later, in Flowery Branch, night riders visited a black home on the property of Raymond Carlile, a white man. Carlile met them with a shotgun and was able to ascertain their identities, which he promptly turned over to the sheriff. Five more whites were arrested. Beneath the headline, “LAWLESSNESS MUST CEASE,” the *Gainesville News* condemned the White Caps: “The Negro with any sense does not have to be told his place. He already knows it and will keep it.”

These events dampened further harassment of blacks outside Forsyth and Dawson. In those two counties, it didn’t matter anymore. The *Dahlonge Nugget* of October 18 reported, “A gentleman of Forsyth County, who was here last week, said every Negro who lived in it was gone, not a single one left to tell the tale.”

The only unfinished business was the execution of Knox and Daniel. The jury had specified that the execution be private, witnessed only by executing officers and sufficient guards, relatives of the condemned and desired clergymen. A wooden fence was built around the gallows. But on the night of October 24, the fence was burned, and a crowd of between 8,000 and 10,000 shouted and cheered from an adjacent hilltop the following morning as Knox and Daniel were led to the nooses. Quiet settled as a minister prayed for their souls, then a second benediction followed. At 11 a.m. on October 25, 1912, dual trap doors opened at the same second.

The bodies hung, dead, in the autumn air. The memory of that morning is in the air still.

The most lasting reminder has been the absence of blacks in a county which has, in the last decade, rocketed in population from about 16,000 to 25,000. Major new

industries have located there. Georgia Highway 400 now rolls through, making the area more accessible to Atlantans. Life there is taking on a faster, more urban pace. But for all the physical change, attitudes remain much the same.

One Forsyth county woman said recently, “My daddy said, many times before he died, ‘I have never been sorry that our people ran the niggers out of the county. I believe we could have run them all the way back to Africa. This is the only thing I’m sorry of, not completing the job. Sooner or later, they are going to be the downfall of this country.’ We must be willing to stand for what we believe to be right and never be ashamed. He believed he had to do what he did. I believe he was absolutely right. That is why I have helped to see his story written down.”

Most are not so pleased to see the story retold. This letter, one of several which followed the publication of portions of the story in the *Gainesville Times*, can probably be taken as an indicator of the feelings and logic of a great many Forsyth County residents:

“There’s a reason why you printed two stories about the 1912 incident in Forsyth County and that reason is there is afoot a movement because of the construction of Ga. 400 to move niggers into the area again. Those behind this move are property owners, realtors & politicians who stand to gain by an influx of niggers. The feelings of those who are opposed to the blacks are not given a thought. Anyone can take a long, hard look at Atlanta and clearly see what a takeover by niggers can do. Those Forsyth and Dawson County citizens who don’t want an influx of blacks will likely have their wants trampled on. There is much more black-white trouble ahead when niggers are asked or invited into the area. One big reason for the growth of the area is that this area affords a haven which is not polluted by niggers. The Bible says niggers are black because black is the traditional color of sin and blacks committed the first sin in the new world after Noah’s flood. They were made black because the Creator wanted all succeeding generations to know who the black curse fell upon and not because the sun made them black. The sun tans but niggers are black.”

Signed, “The Forsyth County Anti-Black Committee of Seventeen,” the letter cannot and should not be interpreted as representative of the opinions of all 25,000 Forsyth Countians. However, even if these 17 were alone in their feelings, they would still constitute a greater segment of the population than do blacks.

The daughter of one of the outcast Forsyth blacks commented on this story: “This is good. But you know what’s sad. It only scratches the surface of all the things that happened back then.” A former schoolteacher and a leader of the black community in Gainesville, she said, “My daddy didn’t talk too much about it [the 1912 incident], but I knew the story, even when I was little. I can remember him sitting out on the porch at night crying . . . tears coming down his cheeks. I didn’t understand what he was crying for . . . what had been lost.” □

CB Hackworth is associate district editor of The Times, a daily newspaper in Northeast Georgia. He has received awards for his investigative reporting and short fiction, and is presently completing a novel.

Editor's Note: We asked some of our readers to comment on what the '80s holds for us in the South and beyond. The three writers below each focus, in one way or another, on the enduring dividing and organizing factor in the South and the U.S.: race, racism and black power. We invite other readers to send their comments on the future — your own or articles you feel are worthy of reprinting in our pages.

RACE FOR THE '80s

*looking ahead
through a legacy of the past*

tom dent

In order for its potential for development to be truly realized, the South must still come to terms with *race*: the necessity of allowing for the full development of its non-white peoples.

This truth is de-emphasized these days because we are still reeling from the impact of the immense social changes resulting from the civil-rights movement of the '60s. The South is in somewhat of a congratulatory mood now with respect to "racial progress." For instance, we can see dramatic visible evidence of a black presence in areas of our daily lives that was unthinkable 20, 30 years ago.

If this pride in what has been achieved was accompanied by an equally strong thrust toward continuing change, continuing commitment to equal justice, we would truly have something to be proud of. But, alas, those of us who know the history of what happened know that the motion toward equal justice in the South was generated by pressure from black disenchantment and demonstrations, at painful cost to those who made sacrifices to protest forms of entrenched racial injustice. Now that there is little or no pressure for continuing change, no Movement, few sacrifices, the drive for equality has abated, lost momen-

tum. Even *talk* about social justice, about the more subtle, more pervasive means by which oppression and racism manifest themselves, is considered unfashionable, *passe*, boring. But the problems of racism, oppression of the poor, black and white, will not go away by our looking away.

It is the prime responsibility of black Southerners to keep us from "looking away," to generate a new drive for equal justice in all its forms, to fight for the integrity of Afro-derivative cultures, to make the South not only a land of fulfillment, but of multi-cultural, multi-ethnic fulfillment. This, of course, will take a long time, for the Southern myth of cultural and religious homogeneity has been one of its most damning characteristics.

It is also now — most importantly now — the responsibility of blacks to see to it that the drive for racial gains includes the people on the lowest economic levels, the poorest of the poor, the people of the projects.

Gains for a few, a black elite, at the expense of those who are most underprivileged, will rob the Movement of its broader, more humanistic and socially beneficial goals, no matter in what language such gains are couched. Too often in the South the *recent* black economic and political progress it has come at the expense and neglect of the people on the bottom rung. To have a new generation of black sharers-of-power, or frontmen-for-power in the South, repeating age-old policies of oppression and exploitation, the very heart of racism, is to make a farce of the great ideals of the Movement for people's progress.

And finally, Southern whites must come to accept that an open society, an *open multi-cultural society*, is in

their long-range interest, despite the temporary hardships placed on certain whites who feel threatened by black advances into areas once exclusively theirs (the source of the current revitalization of the Klan). Because the South has such a large percentage of non-white peoples it *must* confront the necessity of a multi-cultural society; other regions of the United States may be able to persist longer in their Euro-cultural cocoons.

The progressive move toward a multi-racial, multi-cultural society must be accompanied by a re-examination of American and Southern history, a progressive and insistent recanting of Southern myths and lies passed off as history. This will be painful — so much societal emotional energy has been invested in these myths — but it must be done.

The "romance" of the Old South is a romantic myth built on injustice, slavery, the historical exploitation of a people, at the cost of moral self-exploitation of the propagators and their descendants.

Once these myths have been destroyed, once a truer, more multi-rooted sense of history gains recognition and currency, then the *history* of the South, as with the history of any person who has re-examined himself/herself by forcing up painful, previously inadmissible truths, will free the South. The South freeing itself from its own acute, evil prisons of shackled minds to face, really, a strong future — maybe not even as *American*, but as a *people* in this ever-spinning world.

Tom Dent, a native of New Orleans, has worked with the Free Southern Theater and the Congo Square Writers Union in New Orleans.

stetson kennedy

Some time after my book *Southern Exposure* was published by Doubleday in 1946, I swore I would never write another word about anything having to do with the South.

Aunt Lizzie didn't think I was qualified, having been born in Florida. When I persisted, she summed it all up to her own satisfaction by saying, "All I've got to say is: anybody who wants to be ruled by [blacks] ought to be ruled by [blacks]."

"I do think you would rather be with them than with us," my sister said at dinner on another occasion.

"As a matter of fact, I would," I replied, and left the family table for good.

A lot happened during the 35 years or so between now and then. But essentially what happened was that the irresistible force of black militancy (with an appreciable amount of white support) came up against the immovable object of "white supremacy," and overcame same. It was a long haul.

Very many of the problems, with some notable exceptions, are with us yet. To be sure, "great progress has been made." But this has always been the palliative offered by those who want to brake progress. In many respects, in short, we would do well today and tomorrow, in our search for basic solutions, to look ahead to the Populism of the 1890s and the New Deal of the 1930s.

For just when you're about to be carried away by Atlanta's boast of

being "the city too busy to hate," you rub your cab driver the wrong way and discover he's still a Kluxer under the skin. Or you turn off the expressway onto some by-road and find white folks out in the sticks acting like they never heard of any such thing as civil-rights laws. There is still truth in what the old-time black said: "When you in Rome, Georgia, you got to act like it."

Seems like the South is always standing at some crossroads or other, with perdition awaiting in one direction and salvation in the other.

A major component of any Southern Agenda must of course be a Black Agenda designed to progressively compensate for past injustices and make equality of opportunity more of a reality for the black masses. When I ran as an independent write-in candidate for the U.S. Senate in 1952 against George Smathers on a platform of "Total Equality," we were a long way from being there. And we still are.

Not only must the forces of justice not retreat; we must push on. The agenda has not really changed very much; the principal difference is that the law is now for us, rather than against us. This is a very appreciable difference, and one which has great bearing upon strategy and tactics. Marching and confrontation always have and always will get results when more polite forms of persuasion prove of no avail. As for so-called TV riots, I feel they are counter-productive, though I have no difficulty whatever understanding a feeling that The Establishment, being based so largely upon exploitation and deprivation, owes its customers an occasional bonus. But the targets are often wrong, being establishment rather than The Establishment. That sort of effort invested in political action would bring far more positive results.

Having sounded that conservative note, let me add a seemingly more radical one. It is my conviction that a Black Agenda ought to stress not just affirmative action, but also reparations. It does not take a student of black history to know that it was very largely black labor — blood, sweat and tears — that transformed the South from a howling wilderness into whatever it was when the bulldozers took

over. If we could compel Germany to pay reparations for work performed by slave labor during World War II, I see no reason why the living descendants of slaves in America should not demand and get reparations for the ripoffs of the past.

Any honest balance sheet on black progress is obliged to have as its bottom line the fact that, while countless doors have been opened and a substantial black middle class has emerged, the black masses, South and elsewhere, are almost as deprived as ever. Tokenism, which began as an individual dodge, has been expanded to encompass an entire black middle class, leaving the hard-core poor in the lurch. Comes the next depression and we shall see that blacks are still first in line under the old axiom, "Last hired, first fired."

But the greatest peril of all, it seems to me, is the drift back into *de facto* segregation, brought on by the combination of white flight, black separatism and the mutual distaste for school busing. When, shortly after the Civil War, the AME Church led its flock out into the railroad tracks in a desperate attempt to block the first Jim Crow coaches, it correctly foresaw that segregation would usher in another century of bondage. If we don't watch out, we could be herded into another such century, and the fact that the segregation was *de facto* rather than *de jure* wouldn't make that much difference.

While it is all to the good to develop a Southern Agenda and a Black Agenda, we are apt to find as we go along that rather many of the things we long sought to deal with as regional or racial problems have become integrated into national or even universal problems. There remain, of course, some specifically Southern problems, such as kudzu; and some specifically racial problems, such as sickle-cell anemia. But we Southerners, black and white alike, have common interests not so much as Southerners anymore, but as a segment of humanity whose overriding concerns are common to all. Such issues as war or peace, energy depletion, pollution, human rights, population planning, production and distribution, inflation

and depression have us all by the throat, and it would be more appropriate for us to go into battle singing something like "We Shall Overcome" than "Dixie." As one Southerner said back yonder when we first started trying to get whites and blacks into the same union, "If we ever going to get anywhere, we got to get there together."

The life of Martin Luther King epitomizes this "nationalization" and "universalization" of what were once regarded as sectional issues. No sooner did he get the black foot securely in the door of the American mainstream than he turned his attention to the plight of the poor generally, and to such "distant" issues as the war in Vietnam. From race struggle to class struggle to self-determination for distant peoples — that was the road he traveled, and, like Andy Young, we can do no better than to follow in his footsteps.

We tend to think of Stetson Kennedy as a sort of godfather, from whose pioneering book Southern Exposure we got not only our name but a number of excerpts which have appeared in our pages. Kennedy was part of the brave band of Southerners who stormed the ramparts in the '30s and '40s under such standards as the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, Southern Negro Youth Congress, Highlander Folk School and the CIO's Operation Dixie. The bulk of his papers reflecting those decades of struggle were recently acquired by the Archive of Southern Labor History at Georgia State University. He spent more than a decade as an undercover agent inside the KKK, and the evidence he gathered not only appeared in his book The Klan Unmasked, but he was also used to good advantage by public prosecutors and journalists such as Walter Winchell and Drew Pearson. Another Kennedy book, Jim Crow Guide to the USA (Greenwood Press), is probably the most complete record of "the way it was" when segregation was an integral aspect of American life. He is now finishing off a documentary book to be entitled After Appomatox: How the South Won the War.

ben chavis

I believe that we African people, black people, in America have come to the point in our history where we must declare our political independence from the forces that dominate us. I believe we've reached a point, my brothers and sisters, that we can no longer be inextricably involved and linked to political parties which do not have black liberation as their principle objective. The Democratic and Republican parties do not have the interest of black liberation in mind or in principle or in anything else. They want to use us. They live their lives at the expense of the suffering of black people; but around election time, they realize that they need us — our votes, that is — to make a difference to keep them in power. We go in cycles every four years, sometimes every two years, and some folk

who are actually working in those parties go through it every week.

I'm saying the time has come for us to create, if we're serious about our liberation, an entity that we first of all control, that is accountable to our black people, to the grass roots brothers and sisters, a political entity that is moving in the direction of our own liberation. The time has therefore come for the establishment of an independent national black political party. I'm not saying that I'm against white people *per se*. I'm in an integrated church. I worship with white folk. I'm the co-director of a national organization that is integrated. Nothing wrong with that. The only thing I'm saying is that in some area of life, I as a black person have to put the liberation of black people as a priority. And that when it comes to politics, let your politics be in the direction of the liberation of your people and not in the direction of the maintenance of the status quo.

We have had several conferences in the last years to discuss these issues. One was in Gary, Indiana, in 1972; another in Cincinnati and one in Little Rock. At the Fourth National Black Political Convention these issues were again debated. Some people wanted to procrastinate by saying this is not the right time. But I'm happy to say that a majority of the delegates voted in favor of the establishment of a national independent black political party. The convention will be held in Philadelphia



Mary Anne Foreland

on November 21, 22 and 23. Now that is after the November election, and we know that regardless of who wins, we'll still be faced with the reality that the socio-economic state of black Americans is worse than it's ever been since Reconstruction. We'll still be faced with the reality of a prison population on the dramatic increase. Of who? Us! We'll still be faced with the reality of the black infant mortality rate on the increase. We'll still be faced with the fact that in some parts of this country, almost half of all black young people don't finish high school.

No great white hope is going to go to the White House and free Black America. Be it Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan or John Anderson. Whoever wins this November, the socio-economic status of black people is not going to markedly change. Presidential candidates may say, "Well you all vote for me and I'll make some more appointments." Appointments don't change the system. If anything, they maintain the system.

The struggle in the '80s is not only to stop the suffering of our people or to win a few seats at the big table, but to raise some fundamental questions about the economic and political structure of this society. Racism and monopoly, exploitative capitalism are the two main forces that give rise to the statistics that I just made reference to, and we will remain in the worst shape that we've ever been until the very nature of this system is changed. I'm not saying that an independent black political party is going to do everything. But I am saying it will provide a viable alternative for 30 million people in this land that right now don't have a viable alternative, people whose voice and power is lost and abused in the present system.

Part of the present situation of our powerlessness is our fault. I can point the finger at the Man all day long — and the finger needs to be pointed at him. But we've got some homework to do within the black community, within the black family, within our own lives. We must look at ourselves and our world — which is what we did in New Orleans at that convention — and we must analyze the American context of our lives and make a decision about how we can empower ourselves in that

context. That kind of analysis shows that our politics and our power can best be represented, articulated, and promulgated to the extent that we have our own political party. We are talking about black liberation as something we must struggle around everyday. Let me give you just one example of what we're up against.

Just this week I was in the home of the ambassador of Grenada, a small African country in the Caribbean, which has fought for its independence. There is now a big smear campaign going on in Washington to discredit this legitimate black government. Black folks down in the Caribbean are running their own affairs. They have thrown off the British, thrown off the Americans, and even though they are a small country with few natural resources, the U.S. wants to jump on them and squash them, because if anywhere in this hemisphere black folk stand up and run their own affairs, it destroys the myth. You see we have been duped and fooled and misled to believe that we cannot free ourselves, that we cannot have a politics that is independent of our oppressor. I'm saying that is not true, that we can do it . . . with the help of God.

We need to organize our people and have a revitalization of the sense of struggle and movement in our community. What do I mean by that? All of the national black organizations that work in some consistent way with the black community have to work together. The clergy and the political leadership that we have must especially have as a principle and the goal underlying their very existence the organization of all our people. What do I mean by organize? The first level of organization is communication. Just knowing who you are. Do you know there's no such thing as a black mailing list. Black folks don't even know who they are. If you wanted to communicate with all black people in your state, you couldn't do it. And beyond just knowing their addresses, we ought to really know them. I've been in cities where folk no longer even know who their next door neighbor is, don't even know their names, because we have lost the sense of community. We've lost the sense of

extended families.

Ron Karenga says that one of the things we need to have is our own value system, and that our value system has to be geared toward our liberation with such principles as *umoja* or unity at the center. That's very important, but I think we have to organize around those principles every day. If we believe that we need black unity, then we ought to go out and organize black unity.

I've been out of prison now for 10 months, and I've had the opportunity to travel to many black communities around the country. One of the phenomena that I have seen is that so many of our brothers and sisters are ducking for cover, backing away from the imperative to organize and struggle for black liberation. Black professionals are even ducking for cover. The report that the National Urban League issued at the beginning of 1980 entitled "The State of Black America" showed that the black so-called middle class is on the decline. Folks are saying things are so bad that we have to wait until these white folks get the economy straight before we can start our struggle again. But I say we should celebrate inflation because it gives us time to organize our people while white folks are looking elsewhere. While they are trying to rebuild their economy, they can't keep an eye on us too. They're in a real quandary.

The Third World has risen up and said no longer are you going to get our oil for nothing. No longer are you going to get our gold or diamonds for nothing. In fact, you might not get it at all. The imperialistic octopus which emanates from the U.S. is looking for somewhere else to bloodsuck. Malcolm X says, "You show me a capitalist in its purest form and I'll show you a blood-sucker." And that's right! This vampire's done turned on itself! White folks are sucking themselves to death, economically. The multinational corporations don't care anything about national inflation.

This confusion and conflict is a sign of the time. But it's a good sign. The Book of Revelation is about the end. But it's not about the end of the world. Nobody knows when the world is going to end. God is going to take care

of that. And so we ought to stop ducking for cover, like the world is going to end tomorrow morning. The Book of Revelation is not about the end of time; it's about the time of the end. The end of injustice. The end of oppression. The end of human misery. The issuing of a new order. There is a new order issuing in, and black Americans ought to celebrate that with our brothers and sisters in Grenada, in the Caribbean, in Latin America and Africa, because the world is taking care of business.

During this reapportionment that the U.S. is going through, we have to make sure that we have as our priority our own liberation. Inflation is not the number one problem facing black America. It's the number one problem facing those who would oppose us. Our problem is that they're the ones in power. And that they're just itching for an excuse to start a war somewhere. As the Third World transforms the face of the world community, there is a constant threat of war from those now in power. That is a problem for all of us to confront and struggle against in the coming decade.

The 1980s are going to be filled with trials and tribulations. We have to go through them, over and around them. And I'm saying to you that we need faith and new political entities to do this now. We need a renewed sense of our struggle and a renewed faith in our community. We need to build a political force that is accountable to that community and that is honest to that struggle for black liberation. And most of all, we need a renewed faith. We need to believe together! We need to believe together that God is with us in this struggle. If you believe that, then you step out there and you can take the risks that will be necessary in these times. You step out on faith and act together. □

The Reverend Ben Chavis is most widely known as one of the Wilmington 10 defendants. He is a minister in the United Church of Christ, director of the Church's Washington, D.C., office and co-director of the Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice. This article is taken from Chavis' speech to a group of social workers in August, 1980.

Falling Out of the Barn

... For My Father

The summer I turned ten was when I slipped from the third tier in the little tobacco barn. I fell like a hoecake, a dream, a tumbling star, cartwheeled through the aromatic dark heavy with the fragrance of cured bottom primings, past the thick tier poles that flashed by like sleeping logs or huge hungry snakes, vision blurring, falling falling down, down, trying to remember what you said about learning how to fall, the right way:

“If you climb, you're bound to fall. You only get one chance to learn. You can't take time to be scared: save your scares for later. Go limp, to keep your bones limber. If you have to, turn, twist until you're falling face down. You got to see, to be able to pick the place where you want to land. Hit on all fours, like a cat you shake out of the damson tree. You don't fall, really: you drop yourself, slow, and land rolling once you feel dirt under your feet. Be careful thrashing around up there: watch out your head doesn't knock on any of the bottom tiers on your way down. I heard that once: exactly like you busted open a watermelon on a rock or dropped a coconut. That boy was deader than the one in the lions den in front of Daniel long before he hit the ground. He stepped on a kingsnake sleeping up on the top tiers. That's what I mean about not wasting time with fear: you get scared, more often than not you're going to lose your head. And I almost forgot: try not to fall on any of the flue pipes. I just re-daubed them day before yesterday. Now climb on up to the top and remember what I said.”

I did. It worked. One time, and once was enough.

— Virginia L. Rudder
Hurdle Mills, NC



Tobacco Talk

by Ann Banks

The Federal Writers' Project was based on the idea that unemployed writers, like unemployed carpenters, had a right to jobs. Along with its companion Federal Arts Projects – Music, Art and Theater – the Writers' Project was part of the New Deal's national work relief program. At its peak, the Federal Writers' Project employed 6,500 writers and other white-collar workers for a salary of about \$20 a week. Writers' Project offices in every state reported to a national headquarters in Washington, D.C. During the early years of the Project, the Federal Writers worked on a series of state and local guidebooks; these remain the FWP's best-known undertaking.

Federal Writers went on to gather the largest body of first-person narratives ever collected in this country. Only a small portion of this work was ever published. Two books using Federal Writers' Project narratives appeared not long after the material was collected; they have been called classics of the documentary genre. *Lay My Burden Down* was culled from thousands of interviews with former slaves, and *These Are Our Lives* was an anthology of life-history narratives of black and white Southerners. A recent anthology of FWP life-history materials culled from the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina is *Such As Us: Southern Voices of the Thirties*, edited by Tom Terrill and Jerrold Hirsch (see *Southern Exposure*, Volume VI, Number 1). Many of the narratives published here were intended for anthologies that had not been completed by the time the Project came to an end. These included volumes on granite carvers, western pioneers, tobacco workers and a book of New England life histories to be called *Yankee Folk*.

By the late Depression, the Federal Writers' Project, along with the other Federal Arts Projects, had become a convenient target for conservative attacks on the New Deal. In the wake of hostile criticism from the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Congress decentralized and curtailed the Project in 1939. The Writers' Project came to a complete halt following America's entry into World War II. Its most innovative publication plans had to be abandoned, and the full potential of the life-history collection was never realized.

Most of the first-person narratives in the Library of

Congress collection were gathered under the direction of FWP's Folklore Unit. The Folklore Unit favored interview methods that encouraged people to talk freely about themselves, "following the natural association of ideas and memories." Life stories were to be "narrated as told by an informant . . . with all the flavor of talk and all the native art of casual narration belonging to the natural storyteller." These instructions to Federal Writers were formulated by Benjamin A. Botkin, who was folklore editor of the Project in 1938 and 1939.

Botkin developed his own unconventional approach to the subject of folklore. He had no interest in indulging "nostalgia for the old, the odd and the picturesque." Folk materials, he believed, must be viewed "dynamically as part of the process of cultural conflict, change and adaptation." As folklore editor of the Writers' Project, he wanted to explore the rough texture of everyday life, to collect what he called "living lore." Before Botkin joined the Project, its folklore collecting had focused on traditional rural lore – superstitions, ghost stories – for use in the American Guide series. Botkin shifted the emphasis to urban and industrial material. He believed the people's work lives, viewed in the context of their neighborhood and ethnic group, provided the richest source of folk material. "Folklore," he once said, "has a direct relation to the work men do and their attitude toward it."

The work of the Writers' Project was meant to instruct as well as describe. In the late '30s many Americans were horrified by the rise of fascism in Europe and worried about possible consequences at home. Rabbi Stephen Wise, a founder of the American Jewish Congress, encouraged the Writers' Project to publish material sympathetic to ethnic diversity "as a way of preventing European hatreds from infecting our own country." Botkin warned that those who collected folklore must beware of fueling reactionary notions of racial purity. It was necessary, he said, to distinguish "democratic and progressive folk consciousness from the regressive folk dogma of the racialists and nationalists."

Botkin believed, with many of the intellectuals of his generation, that the artist should be a useful member of society. He suggested that writers could find a sense of

community and social purpose by taking part in the group activity of folklore research. Again and again he stressed the importance of the *process* of collecting narratives. The best results, he wrote, were obtained "when a good informant and a good interviewer get together and the narrative is the process of the conscious or unconscious collaboration of the two." Botkin sought to implement this philosophy through specific instructions to Federal Writers: "Make your informant feel important," he directed. "Well-conducted interviews serve as social occasions to which informants come to look forward."

Such advice was, of course, interpreted according to the temperament and inclinations of individual fieldworkers, as I discovered in conversations with several former Federal Writers. Stetson Kennedy, of the Florida Writers' Project, recalls that he established a comfortable atmosphere by interviewing people in their homes over a glass of beer. "Before tackling anything as personal as a life history," he says, "we naturally established a good deal of rapport with the person, before getting around to telling them their lives were so interesting they should be written down. Most people agreed and the more notes you took, the better they liked it."

Frank Byrd, a black Federal Writer, became good friends with several of the Harlem residents he interviewed. "You can't just barge in and start asking questions of people who don't know who you are and how you feel as a person. You have to pass the time of day with them until you reach the point where you feel a warm relationship so that you can talk, so that *they* can talk."

Ralph Ellison was equally informal: "I hung around playgrounds; I hung around the street, the bars. I went into hundreds of apartment buildings and just knocked on doors. I would tell some stories to get people going and then I'd sit back and try to get it down as accurately as I could. Sometimes you would find people sitting around on Eighth Avenue just dying to talk, so you didn't have to encourage them too much."

Since the Federal Writers themselves were on relief, they were frequently accepted as sympathetic equals by those they interviewed. Betty Burke recalls feeling a bond of shared adversity with the packinghouse workers she talked to. "We were dirt poor ourselves and these people were, if anything, even poorer, so I was very close to them. I understood every word they said with all my heart."

Black writers were among those who benefited most from the opportunity offered by the Project. Novelists Ralph Ellison, Margaret Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, Arna Bontemps, Richard Yerby and Richard Wright all served literary apprenticeships on the Writers' Project. Wright had worked in the Chicago Post Office before becoming a Federal Writer; he used the extra time the Project gave him to write *Native Son*. Ralph Ellison, who joined the Project at Wright's instigation, says now that it encouraged him to think of himself as a professional writer for the first time: "Actually to be *paid* for writing . . . why that was a wonderful thing."

The Federal Writers learned from practicing the technique of collecting narratives as well as from the content of the narratives themselves. The FWP life histories were gathered before the days of tape recorders, and the mechanical recording methods available to the Project were too expensive and cumbersome for any but a very few collecting expeditions. Instead, the FWP interviewer was encour-

aged to work at being "a good listener with a good ear for recording or remembering both what is said and how it is said." *The Manual for Folklore Studies* emphasized accuracy. Federal Writers were directed to "take down everything you hear, just as you hear it, without adding, taking away or altering a syllable. *Your business is to record, not correct or improve.*"

Ralph Ellison was one who heeded Botkin's advice that the Federal Writers should learn to listen for characteristic speech rhythms and the vernacular. In his Writers' Project interviews, Ellison began to experiment with ways of capturing the sound of black speech that he refined in his novel, *Invisible Man*. "I tried to use my ear for dialogue to give an impression of just how the people sounded. I developed a technique of transcribing that captured the idiom rather than trying to convey the dialect through misspellings."

The Federal Writers' Project pioneered the collection of first-person narratives by people who would not otherwise have left a record. Benjamin Botkin called on historians to be sensitive to "history from the bottom up," in which the people become their own historians. He believed that "history must study the inarticulate many as well as the articulate few." The advent of tape recorders in the years following the 1930s has refined the practice of what has come to be called oral history and made it possible for Botkin's goals to be pursued more easily.

One widely read oral history — a book whose subject matter parallels this one — is Studs Terkel's *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*, published in 1970. Terkel himself worked on the Illinois Writers' Project. More than 30 years later he asked an "improvised battalion of survivors," people who had lived through the Depression, to talk about that grim decade and reflect on how it had shaped their lives. Their retrospective accounts are colored by the intervening years — they are memories of the 1930s. In contrast, the people whose life histories are published here are voices *from* the '30s. Their words reflect the perspectives, the sensibilities of the decade in which they told their stories.

John Mason, a tenant farmer, told a Federal Writer that tobacco was a 13-month crop: he cut flue wood and prepared a seedbed for next year's crop before he had finished selling last year's. In the late 1930s the hard work of cultivation brought an uncertain return. If he were not ruined by any of a raft of natural hazards ranging from hail to blue mold, the tobacco grower and his family tended the crop through the complicated curing process. They then graded the tobacco and delivered it to a warehouse in town, where a range of market variables affected the sale. The crop was auctioned off for a price that fluctuated according to "last summer's weather in South Georgia, the buying instructions issued by the big three tobacco manufacturers that morning, the farmer's knowledge of grading, the position of his tobacco on the auction floor and whether the buying line happens to approach it from the east or west and the fortunate chance that he took one of the buyers fox hunting last spring."

Tobacco was a gambler's crop. The uncertainties of prices and crop yields that confronted all tobacco growers were even harsher for tenant farmers and sharecroppers who owned no land. A nonperishable cash crop, tobacco was particularly suited to the tenant system, in which



Durham, NC, tobacco warehouse, 1930s.

farmers either rented land or worked it in exchange for a share of the crop. Landlords and larger land owners could afford to wait until tobacco prices rose before disposing of their share of the crop. Tenants could not. As the high tobacco prices of the World War I era declined during the 1920s, more and more tobacco farmers saw themselves and their neighbors losing their land, changing from farm owners to tenants and sharecroppers. Prices continued to fall in the early 1930s during the period people called Hoover Times. By the end of the decade three out of four farmers were tenants in the most productive tobacco region of North Carolina. Even by Depression standards, their poverty was extreme: a WPA study found that the average family income for sharecroppers was 400 dollars in 1937, a good year for Southern agriculture. (This figure includes cotton sharecroppers, who were even poorer than tobacco sharecroppers.)

These circumstances — together with New Deal agricultural policies favoring land owners — combined to drive tenant families from the farms and into the cities like Durham, where they might find “public work” or paid non-agricultural employment. Even those farmers who were not forced off the land by poverty frequently made their

way into the city. Most of the men interviewed here had abandoned full-time tobacco farming to work in the warehouses of Durham, where the season’s crop was graded and auctioned to manufacturers, dealers and speculators. The move was not made easily. Both Arthur Barnes, a black handyman who slept in a vacant room in an auction warehouse, and Earl Brady, a skilled auctioneer who probably earned as much as \$10,000 per season, communicated a longing for the farm, a pride in having mastered the intricate techniques of tobacco cultivation.

The low tobacco prices drove marginal farmers off the land and into the cities, so providing the giant tobacco companies (American, Reynolds, Liggett and Myers) with plenty of labor for their factories. Meager though it was, the average annual wage in the tobacco industry of \$925 — lower for black workers — looked good compared to the money to be made in farming. The factories employed blacks and whites, men and women, in jobs that were segregated by race and sex. White men usually monopolized the supervisory and skilled jobs of running the cigarette-making machines, while white women assisted male operators and ran the packing machines. Black men and women were generally confined to handling the tobacco leaf before it reached the machines.

Partly because of the large numbers of unorganized

black and women workers who went into the factories in the 1920s and '30s, union activity in the industry had been limited. But in 1937 the CIO turned to organizing tobacco workers and paid particular attention to blacks. This had a galvanizing effect on the AFL's Tobacco Workers International Union, which increased its own organizing efforts and became more democratic internally in response to competition from the CIO.

Leonard Rapport, director of the FWP tobacco study, interviewed two of the four people presented here. Rapport grew up in Durham, across the street from a tobacco warehouse. During the winter of 1938-39, he gathered life histories by hanging around the tobacco market, making friends, talking, and endlessly playing a card game called setback.

Rapport concedes that his method of returning to see his subjects again and again was "not the most economic way of getting things done, but you did get to know people very well that way."^{*} Although he frequently made notes during conversations, Rapport also sometimes wrote things down as well as he could remember afterwards. "If you're playing cards with somebody it kind of strains the atmosphere to pull out a notebook." Rapport nevertheless insists that his interviews are, as they were intended to be, "told in the words of the subjects . . . almost stenographic accounts." He recalls that "there was a lot of selectivity, of course, but I never put words in someone's mouth."

— Ann Banks
Cambridge, Massachusetts
1980

** All quotations from Leonard Rapport are from an interview with the author, June, 1977.*

Harry Sloan*

interviewed by T. Pat Matthews and Claude V. Dunnagan

Pa was a tenant farmer, just like I am now. Ma and the girls tended the house and the garden, while pa and us boys worked the tobacco. We generally had plenty to eat — roasting ears and string beans and Irish potatoes and okra and collards and turnip greens in summer, and grits and cane syrup and fresh hog meat in winter. We bought green coffee in the bulk and roasted it — only ma kept a package of Arbuckle brand for when the preacher came. On Sundays we had fried chicken, especially if there was company.

None of us children got no education to speak of. There wasn't no compulsory law then to make us to go to school. Sometimes now I wish there had been. I can read printing

a little but I can't read writing, and I never was no good at figuring. We went for a couple of seasons to a little one-room school two miles from home. A funny thing happened once. The teacher had just give me a whuppin for talking too much, and I was feeling powerful bad, and mean, too. On the way home a toadfrog came a-hoppin across the road, just as happy and careless. I couldn't stand to see him looking so pert — so I took a big rock and mashed him out flat. "You won't hop no more," I says.

Just then Bud Seegars come up behind me and says, "Good Lord, boy, didn't you know it's bad luck to kill a toad-frog? It'll make the cow dry up every time, or maybe die. You watch."

When I got home I seen my daddy a-runnin out to the barn with a big long-necked bottle in his hand. The old cow was a-lying on the ground, all bloated up, and pa was pouring a dose of castor oil and turpentine down her throat. "She bust into the clover patch and foundered," he says. I didn't say nothin. That night the old cow died. Pa kept complaining about the green clover a-killing her, and I never did tell him no better. He would just a-give me another whuppin.

Our church was named Welcome Home Church, and it was set way back in a shady grove. In the cool of the evening we'd load up the mule wagon with straw, and all pile in and drive along the sandy road. Then we'd git out and hitch and talk to our friends a few minutes. At the church door the men and women would separate and set on opposite sides of the house. There was lots of babies, and in one corner at the back a bunch of quilts was put on the floor, and the babies laid down to sleep till the meeting was over. There wasn't no light but a couple of kerosene lamps, and it was right hard to pick out the right baby when the meeting broke up. Old Jim Vincent over here has complained all his life about not really being a Vincent — says he was swapped off at a revival meeting when he was a baby.

People know'd how to sing in them days, and the preacher know'd how to preach. He showed us hell on one side and heaven on the other, and there warn't no middle ground. We had to make up our minds, one way or the other.

After the meeting had run about two weeks, there'd be a big baptizing in the creek. The preacher would have on a long black coat and wade out to his waist in the muddy water. He'd poke around with his walking cane to see there wasn't no roots or stumps for nobody to get hurt on. Then he'd stand there in the water and tell how John the Baptist baptized Jesus, and how there wasn't no other way to salvation. The converts was all lined up on the bank, about 40 or 50 of em. The girls was dressed in white and looked kind of scared. Then the crowd would sing, "Shall we gather at the river, the beautiful, beautiful river," and the line would move down into the water. The girls' dresses would float up around their waists, and the preacher would poke em down with his cane. He'd lay his hands on each one and say, "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, amen," and then he'd dip em over backward into the water. As they come up, he'd pat each one on the shoulder and say, "Sister, you're saved." The girls would come up on the bank all dripping wet, and the women would throw a cloak around em and take em off somewhere and dress em in dry clothes.

That's the way I happened to marry Sally. We was

** Fictitious name.*

converted at the same meeting and baptized at the same baptizing. When she come up out of the water, all shivering and blue around the lips, I know'd right then I wanted to marry her. She was 16 and I was 19, and her folks didn't make no objection. We rented a little place back in the Blue Creek district, and I got a job sawmilling. I got 50 cents a day, and it was pretty hard getting along. Sally had a baby that year, and by spring the mill had cut all the timber out and I lost my job. Then I rented another place and went to tobacco farming on the shares.

Tending five acres of tobacco is hard work for one man and a mule, especially when you got a landlord like I had. His name was Harold Kimzey. He advanced credit for fertilizer and stuff and charged me 10 percent interest. When it wasn't paid on time, he added 20 percent more. At the end of the year, we had a little trouble. We had a record of all our dealings, with the date of everything on it. Sally kept the figures and she's good at it. Come settling time, by the landlord's figures, all the crop was his and we still owed him. Our figures showed he owed us. We got a third party to help us, and we found we had a lot of the crop to our part. Mr. Kimzey had took our peas and all our corn, but when the mistake was found we got our 12 bushels of peas and 20 barrels of corn back. But Kimzey was mad, and he turned us out of the house on January first with no meat or other provisions except the peas and corn. We went from one landlord to another, and each one was worse than the last.

Then I rented a farm from H.K. Fettor, the best man I ever farmed with. His land wasn't much good, but he treated us right. By that time I had six children and seven dogs. Some of the children was big enough to work, and we put in 14 hours a day in the field. When the tobacco was being barned and graded, we put in 18. I worked myself sick and didn't make nothing much. I decided it wasn't no use, and went to hunting with my dogs and getting drunk. Seem like it was all the pleasure I had.

One Saturday night I come home pretty well filled up with liquor, and I was mighty cold. Sally and all the children had gone to bed, and the house was dark. I saw a few coals in the fireplace, and got down on my knees to blow em into a flame. I blowed and blowed, but nothing happened. Then I seen I was just blowing a patch of moonlight that come through the window and fell on the ashes. I got up and tried to go to bed, but the bed was going round and round, and I couldn't catch up with it. So I just stood by the door and waited for it to come around to me. Every time the bed would come around I'd make a jump for it, and every time I jumped I'd hit the floor, kerplunk. Sally woke up and got me into the bed and took off my shoes and covered me up. This oughta broke me from drinking, but it didn't.

I reckon we've got along pretty well, considering everything. If it wasn't for careless, mean landlords and low tobacco prices, a tenant farmer could make out. Most of the houses we've lived in have been in bad shape — glass broke out and half the windows boarded up. If the roof leaks the tenant has to fix it himself — no use waiting for the landlord to do it. We've never had electricity, nor any water except a well. I never heard of a telephone in a tenant house — but we wouldn't have no use of one anyway.

The worst trouble is never knowing what you're going to do next. A farmer never knows what his tobacco will bring. There ain't no regular market price like there is for cotton.



Robert Amberg

There's a hundred different kinds of tobacco, and the farmer's always got the wrong kind to fetch a good price. The buyers know what they're doing, and the warehousemen know, but the farmer don't know nothing. He has to take what he can get and be thankful he ain't starving. I don't believe nobody knows what the auctioneer says. It's just a lot of stuff got up to fool people.

When I first started out I hoped to buy a farm sometime, but I soon saw I couldn't do this, so I give up the idea. My next aim was to have a good pack of hounds and some good guns. I have them. Best of all, I've raised my children to be respectable. I've got 10, which is one short of what my daddy done, but Sally says she don't care if it is. Her health ain't what it once was, and she has to take medicine for female trouble. But we have a happy home, plenty of dogs, stock and farming tools, and we are satisfied and happy.

Arthur Barnes

interviewed by Leonard Rapport

Upstairs, over the office of Danny Kelly's Leaf Warehouse, was a room reserved for black farmers to spread their quilts and sleep when they brought their tobacco in to auction. During the off-season it served as handyman Arthur Barnes' bedroom. Barnes lived in the warehouse, but because he was black, he was not included in the ongoing setback game. Leonard Rapport recalls, "The card players liked him, there was a mutual respect, but the boundaries were familiar to all concerned."

PREACHER'S LICENSE

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every Creature."

This certifies that Brother Arthur Barnes is a member of the Mount Pisgah Baptist Church of Creedmoor, State of North Carolina.

Being in good and regular standing, he is held in the highest esteem by us. Believing he has been called of God to the Work of Gospel Ministry, we do hereby give him our entire and cordial approbation in the improvement of his gifts by preaching the Gospel as Providence may afford him opportunity. We pray the Great Head of the Church will endow him with all needful grace and crown his labors with abundant success.

11 day July, 1936
Rev. Tralington, Pastor
Miss Eunice Hollowell, Church Clerk

The Mount Pisgah Baptist Church is my home church. All my folks, my sisters and brothers, my daddy, my uncles and their families, belonged to it. That was near where we were raised, on the old McNeir plantation four miles from Creedmoor by the old road.

The first work I ever knew was to work tobacco. I like it better than anything I ever did. My daddy was a tobacco farmer; he never raised any cotton. He was a sharecropper and he always made a good crop. I took the family in charge when he died, July 26, 1911; I was 17, there was nine of us, and I was the oldest boy. I've been having a load from then until now. My daddy always tended what we called 30,000 hills of tobacco, and corn and cane in proportion. There's 4,000 hills of tobacco to the acre. It was what we called a two-horse crop; probably with these new ploughs you could work it much nearer than a two-horse crop.

After my daddy died, the landlord sold the place and we had to move. We left that fall, after we housed my father's crop. I wanted more land. I seen where I had a big family and could use more land, and the new owner wouldn't give it to me because I was a boy. When they wouldn't give me a chance like they should of, and then saw I was going, they come and begged me to stay, but I went anyway. I kept on improving until I was experienced and could cure and tend as well as anybody.

We went to Mr. Robert Thompson's plantation, about two miles north of the McNeir place. I worked on shares there. He had about 800 acres and could of give me a chance, but he didn't. I had plenty of land but didn't have the horsepower to work it. I used his stock and he fed it; I paid half the fertilizer and we split what the crop brought.

The next year I sharecropped with Mr. Charley Powell. He gimme a good chance; I cleared 600 dollars on a 2,000-dollar crop. My next oldest brother worked for wages, and all the rest helped me. The next year I rented a whole plantation for standing rent, 100 dollars a year, and paid part of that in advance. That was a bad crop year; the wilt hit me and the crop got drowned out and left me 600 dollars in the hole. I'd bought two horses the year before and I turned one of them back in and sold the other one. Next year we moved to Mr. Luke Lang's. I was keeping on moving in just about a mile circle right back toward the McNeir plantation where I was raised.

One reason you move around so much is you get land in cultivation and then the man will want the land, and rather than cultivate new land or old land grown up with little pines and broomsedge you move on to another place. In those days I never was interested in buying a place. I could have very easy, but I just never did.

We made a good crop on shares with Mr. Lang, and I got married. My wife was from the edge of Wake and Granville County and I'd met her at church singings. When we was young boys, we'd walk all over the county to see girls. It wasn't nothing to walk five or six miles at night to see a girl, though the places where I was I could use the horses day or night — they knew I'd take care of them. She was a member of the Salt Branch Church and I was carrying a choir at the Mount Pisgah Church and we'd meet and sing against each other.

On April 4, 1917, my wife gave birth to a boy. She never was well no more. She had heart dropsy and there was nothing could be done for her. The baby died on the eight-



Stephen March

eenth of June and she died on August 12.

I finished out my time and then carried my things back to momma's. The next year (1919) we went to Mr. Harvey Martin's. He had about 1,500 acres of land and wouldn't rent noway but on shares. I bought me another horse. Mr. Martin would furnish stock or else feed yours. He was a fertilizer dealer too, and he was awful free to furnish his people all through the year, but when fall came he got the big end of the horn; in the windup most of the people on his place owed him all they made.

In those days I was selling mostly in Oxford. When I was on shares I'd take the crop to market and sell it. If the landlord wasn't along we'd meet at the bank or else I'd leave his half there and bring him a stub. We'd have an understanding before I made a crop, but I never had it down in writing. I got good prices for my tobacco; I never had any trouble about it on account of being colored. It seemed like I always had pull with the leading men. If I had a grade of tobacco Colonel Matthews of the Imperial could use, I'd call him; he'd look out for me. On a market generally the average good-thinking man never gets in trouble or robbed. He might get tackled sometimes; I've even had em try me. If you'll just keep out of the bootleg joints you're

all right.

The next year I moved to Mr. Jackson's. He had a man on his place and they'd had differences and he wanted somebody to finish out. The man who'd left had his wood all cut, his corn planted, and his tobacco plants ready to be set. I used Mr. Jackson's mules and made a splendid crop.

While I was on Mr. Jackson's place I had some trouble with his cousin. His cousin was a dirty man – the only man who ever tried to mess me up. He rented some land from Mr. Jackson the third year I was there. He asked me to go and buy him a horse at a sale and he'd pay me for the horse and for feeding him. I bought him the horse on October 15 – and I fed him off my feed from then to March 2. He should have gone to the store to make arrangements for feed for the horse but he didn't do it. So I went over and got some in his name. That fall when it come due he tried to jump the account. He finally met up with me in the sorting barn and struck me in the forehead with a mattock – we had a bloody fight. I run him off and he went to Creedmoor and got a warrant and the police. We went to court, and he had to pay the bill for me feeding the horse for three months.

We came to Durham about 15 years ago. My sisters and all wanted to come to town and I knew if they could make it in town I could. When we first come here I started working for Mr. Kelly in the winter seasons unloading and packing tobacco that farmers brought in to sell, and when I'd get through I'd work in the leaf department. I'd work here by the hour and sometimes get in enough time to make 20 or 25 dollars a week.

I got married again about three years ago. My wife's out in service and stays with her mother. I moved up here in the warehouse at Christmas. This room is where colored people stay when they bring in their tobacco. They sleep on the benches and we keep this stove going. All this furniture's mine: the bed, table, frigerator and bureau. I'll have to move it out again when the season opens. Mr. Kelly let me stay here just to be on the place. The insurance people has to have somebody here on the place all the time so I stay up here. I cook my meals on the stove and burn old baskets and scrap wood and coal.

Most of the hour hands during the season are from Durham, but some packers come from South Carolina and some follow the markets all the way around. We've been getting right smart white hands in late years. The biggest majority at this house are white. Lots of those fellows are living now on just any kind of work they can pick up in town. Some don't get more than a couple hours a week. The way I get more is I get in more time than the others.

I go out and preach whenever I get an appointment. I was ordained a deacon in 1914. Some of the old members kicked on it, I was so young, but the church pulled it on anyhow. I worked all the way through the church, from sexton on up. I was teaching and leading singing for 20 or 25 years; that was one of the reasons for coming to town. I taught one choir here and it won 50 dollars, first prize in a singing contest in the city auditorium. I've got lots of books over at mamma's now; I think I'll organize another choir this summer. A preacher friend wants me to go up to Danville. He says there are 12 or 15 churches without pastors and I might be able to take up pastoral work there. I'd like to meet the deacons and see what there is to it. After I get in a little better shape I think I'll get out and do some evangelistic work and preaching.

Earl Brady*

interviewed by Lenoard Rapport

Herbert Baker was the best auctioneer I ever heard. He had the prettiest, softest voice, clear as a bell, and his lower jaw would be going like a sewing machine. When he came out on the floor his clothes were pressed as if he was going to preach, and he wore a high starched collar with the tie tight at the top. People would come a long way just to hear him; from a voice standpoint he was considered great. He'd get five, six, seven thousand dollars a season. When he died, his brother called me long distance to ask if I wanted to take his place in the burley that season — it paid \$2,500 — but I couldn't get away.

I got started auctioneering in Wendell in 1910. My dad had stopped me from school one spring and that made me hot, so I went up on the tobacco market at Zebulon. I tried to figure something I could do, but jobs for country boys then were scarce. I'd done a lot of singing — used my voice a lot — and I realized I had voice enough for auctioneering, so I went after it. In August I had a job selling on the Wendell market. The first day I sold I was scared just about to death, scared I couldn't make the grade. Once I got started I was all right. I suppose I sold 35 or 40,000 pounds at 300 piles an hour that day. I was 20 years old.

I had good training in tobacco; I've seen it from seed to cigarette. When I was 12, 14 years old my father used to bring me to market with him along about from November through January, with two mules pulling the wagon and sometimes a third carried along to help over the bad places. I did quite a bit of curing under his direction. When I was a boy we'd plant Warren tobacco and White-stem Orinoco and Broad Willow Leaf; my daddy would turn 12 or 15 of the healthier stalks out to seed and he'd save what he needed and he'd give a lot away. Now the tendency among farmers is to buy improved seed instead of using their own.

It takes about five or eight years for an auctioneer to hit his prime. One of the main things he has to learn is to work with as little outward effort as possible. If a man looks to be in strain it's likely to get tiresome and bothersome to

the buyers; he has to have the appearance of going along with ease. It's best to pitch your chant in a medium key, for then it's more easy for you to talk and you can rest by varying up or down. In my selling I use a little bit of everything to keep from getting monotonous. I make the syllable or sound; I don't sound out the whole word. "Seven, seven and a quarter, half, three, eight and make the eight plain." I'm a baritone and at times you can hear me clear across the warehouse — when I'm feeling good or coming in about through.

The spirited bidding will come when you hit smoking type: American, Liggett & Myers, Imperial and Reynolds can all use that. There was a time when it was different — when American had the tobacco trust and you had to stand around and wait for the American buyer.* If he'd been on a poker party or drunk you had a bad sale; sometimes you had to go to the barroom to get him.

In those days we were in no hurry. We'd stop by the factories going from one warehouse to another and there'd be lots of homespun liquor. There was good apple brandy made by double distilling, strong as alum. I remember old man Sullivan who bought for Imperial saying, "Earl, you know when I get hold of that stuff it makes me wish I had a neck a yard long and a taster all the way down." He was a fine old man, an elegant dresser, but he liked his liquor. He'd come onto the sale and lean over to pull a hand of tobacco and I'd have to grab him or he wouldn't be able to get back up. We all knew he was old, and his job was his job, and our job was to take care of him, and we did.

I've sold in North Carolina on the Lumberton, Chadbourn, Zebulon, Wendell, Fuquey Springs, Henderson, Winston, Durham markets; in South Carolina at Kingstree, Lake City, Lamar, Darlington, Dillon, Mullins, Hemingay and some I've forgotten. I sold on the first sale ever sold in Baxley, Georgia, and on the opening sale in Valdosta. I've sold in Tifton, Waycross and Douglas, Georgia. In Virginia I've sold at Abingdon and a little sale at South Hill. I was stopping through South Hill and was invited in to sell a few rows — it's customary among auctioneers when a visiting auctioneer drops in to ask him to sell a row or two. It's a funny way of entertaining guests, isn't it? But that's the custom to have them go down a row and back.

I am supposed to go out in the field today with the Lucky Strike cameraman; we spent two hours yesterday in Sparrow's warehouse taking colored pictures of tobacco sales. I got 500 dollars for my endorsement and they've been sending a carton of Luckies a week for 14 months now. They've just given all of us a round trip to the World's Fair; enough for Pullman tickets for two and expense money for the time we're there. I don't know whether I'm going; the warehouse talk is that a lot aren't going to go — going to keep the money for other things.

I've got a seven-room house I built 12 years ago out of town here; I've got an acre of land, nice trees, and a deep well. My oldest boy has finished Carolina and is on a newspaper in the eastern part of the state, and my other boy is a sophomore at Carolina. I've been taking the boys to South Carolina, and Ted, the oldest, made almost enough for his last two years of college. The first summer I took Ted to South Carolina I was busy, so he walked around and almost

**In 1911 the Supreme Court ordered the reorganization of the tobacco trust, and American Tobacco Company broke up into 14 companies.*

* Fictitious name.



Durham, NC

went off his head. He worked around the warehouse but it cost nine dollars a week for his room and board – they always hike the prices in the season and in a small place boarding and rooming houses are scarce. Anyhow, he got pretty discouraged, so I let him speculate on a pile or two occasionally, buy a pile that the house had bought, and pull out the blue leaves and burnt – put its Sunday clothes on, we call it. He messed around like that and averaged 60 dollars a week. By the end of the season he had \$156 left for Chapel Hill, and he was 18 years old, the youngest man on the floor.

Some people are just more apt than others; Ted's more apt at buying than my younger boy. Ted could learn company grades and get to be a company buyer quicker than I could; a young man's quicker to learn that way. I've tried my younger boy at selling – let him sell a time or two – and I think he might get in it unless he finds something else he wants to do. It's a line of work that if he can get it when he finishes school he can make more right off than in any other. I myself am about played out. Thirty years at this is a long time.

Jim Wells*

interviewed by Claude V. Dunnagan

In April, 1939, not long after Jim Wells was interviewed about his work as a union organizer, the Tobacco Workers' International Union called a strike against the Liggett and Myers factory in Durham, which resulted in wage increases and company acceptance of the union.

I was born in a house with tobacco fields on one side and curing barns on the other. Ever since I can remember, my people have worked in tobacco, mothers and sisters, too. When I was five years old my dad made me go out in the fields when tobacco was ripe and pick tobacco worms.

*Fictitious name.

I was so afraid of those big green worms I just walked up and down the rows of tobacco, scared to death one of em would crawl on me. I got over that later, though, I could go out and pinch off their big greasy heads without batting an eyelash.

We didn't live any too good on the farm. Hailstorms, big rains and dry spells would come almost every year, and some years we didn't even make back fertilizer money. We grew some vegetables and had a cow, so we didn't starve.

I like the farm better than the factory any day, but on a farm you just work yourself to a frazzle and don't get anything for it. So I up and went to the city to get a job in the Prince Albert smoking tobacco department. I worked down on the first floor where they made so much noise you can't hear a thing, nothing but the factory whistle when it blows at noon and quitting time. And believe me, when you've stood up on your dogs all day, shoving big sheets of tin into a slicing machine, and handled tin cans till your hands ache, you're damned glad to hear that steam whistle.

I got to going around with a girl whose mother ran the boardinghouse where I stayed. She had a brother who was pretty wild, and one night when I came home he'd skipped out and carried off two of my best suits and a bunch of my shirts. I was pretty mad about it but I didn't say anything because I didn't want to hurt the girl's feelings. She was a nice kid, and I thought more of her than I did my clothes. Her folks was awful broken-up about it and wanted to make it good, but I wouldn't let em.

The girl worked on another floor in the Prince Albert plant and I saw her most every day. Well, the day after her brother ran off with my clothes. I was passing by her machine and I saw she was crying. I went over to her and asked her why. She said because her brother had disgraced her family and that I wouldn't like her anymore. I tried to comfort her and told her not to worry about it and that I liked her just as much as ever.

While I was talking to her, the foreman on that floor came over and told me to get the hell back to my machine and quit running around making his girls cry. I told him I hadn't made her cry.

"You're a damn liar!" he said, just loud enough for her to hear. Well, I lost my temper and slapped that foreman 20 feet across the floor. Right then, I was sorry I did it. Not on account of my job, but because he was an old man. I went over and helped him up and said, "Sorry, old fellow, but you're too old to be calling people liars when you ain't sure." I lost my job all right, but it was worth it. I wasn't aiming for my girl to think I was afraid of any foreman, job or no job.

I went back to the country and farmed a crop of tobacco with my dad that next year. For all the work I put in I didn't make half as much as I'd been making at the factory, so, after market closed, I wandered back to town and started looking for another job. That was just after the Reynolds company opened up their new employment office.

Well, I went in and found they needed a cigarette-packing machine operator. I had a pretty good record on my machine in the smoking tobacco factory, so they put me on and got one of the older workers to show me how to operate the machine.

One day I was walking down the street beside Camel Plant Number 12 and I saw a sign hanging in front of a door between two Negro cafes. It said, "Tobacco Workers'

International Union." I was kind of interested so I went in and talked to the man at the desk. He was a nice fellow and it turned out he was head organizer. After he told me what the union stood for and how it aimed to help the workers, I was convinced, so I joined the tobacco workers' union.

From then on, I had trouble. First, my machine got to working bad and would mess up a lot of cigarettes. The boss would come around and act like he was going to fire me if I didn't quit ruining so many cigarettes. I asked him to send the mechanic around and work on it. Well, he did, about three hours and then it was worse than before.

One day, while they were working on my machine, I was helping paint the big pillars that support the floors. While I was bent over a can of paint, one of the Negro workers I knew came over to me and said in a low voice, "Mr. Jim, how is the union coming?"

I knew the chief operator was around somewhere. I said, "Mose, I can't talk to you now on factory time, but I'll see you at dinner or after work today."

Well, the next thing I knew, the floor boss had collared him over in a corner and was talking to him. In a minute he came back and said for me to come to the office. I went and the boss said, "Jim, I hear you've been stirring up trouble among the Negro workers with your union talk. Is that right?"

"No," I said. "One of em asked me about the union and I told him I couldn't talk on factory time. That's all."

"Well, don't let me hear you talking union around here to these Negroes anymore," he said. "Now get back to work and stay at your machine. It's fixed now."

And it stayed fixed about three hours. When I got home that night, I made up my mind that I was going to get that machine fixed. The next morning, I went up to the chief operator and said, "Look here, Mr. Smith," I said. "If you can't get somebody to fix my machine so it'll run right, I'm going to see some higher authorities about it, and maybe they can get it fixed."

Well, sir, he just blowed up.

"Jim," he said, "when you talk about going to higher authorities, you're getting just a little bit too big for your pants. You're fired!"

While I was in the tin plant the second time I had got married and my wife had been working at the factory all along. After I got fired she stayed on and she's still there. Well, Mr. Allen, the head organizer for the tobacco workers' union, cottoned to me and put me on as a part-time organizer, and I've been there since. I don't get a salary, just expenses, and that's just enough to get around over town and see the workers and talk to em. You have to keep dressed nice, have a haircut now and then, and keep your shoes shined, so the people will respect you. Getting the respect of the workers in this business is mighty important if you're going to do anything for them.

You run into all kinds of people in this work. Some of em are in sympathy with unionism and a lot of em are just plain scared for their jobs and won't join because they're afraid they'll get fired. Every now and then you run across some poor sucker who thinks the company is a fairy godmother and wouldn't think of joining a union.

One evening I went to see a white family over in East Winston. They lived in a four-room shack that a self-respecting pig wouldn't inhabit. The chairs were all broken down, and the three beds in one room were on the floor where the mice and cockroaches could run over em, and the



Wilson, NC, tobacco market, 1930s.

stove was tied together with baling wire. They had about six kids, the oldest one working in the leaf house. When the old man found out what my business was he got up and said, "You get the hell out of my house. My company's treated me good and here you come wanting me to turn against em and lose my job!"

I'm a church man, but I don't attend regularly. I'm so busy helping organize the workers I don't have much time to be with my family. What we need now is a workers' religion that won't talk so much about getting pie in the sky when you die by-and-by, and teach something about how they can better their labor condition here on earth and enjoy the fruits of their labor while they've got a chance.

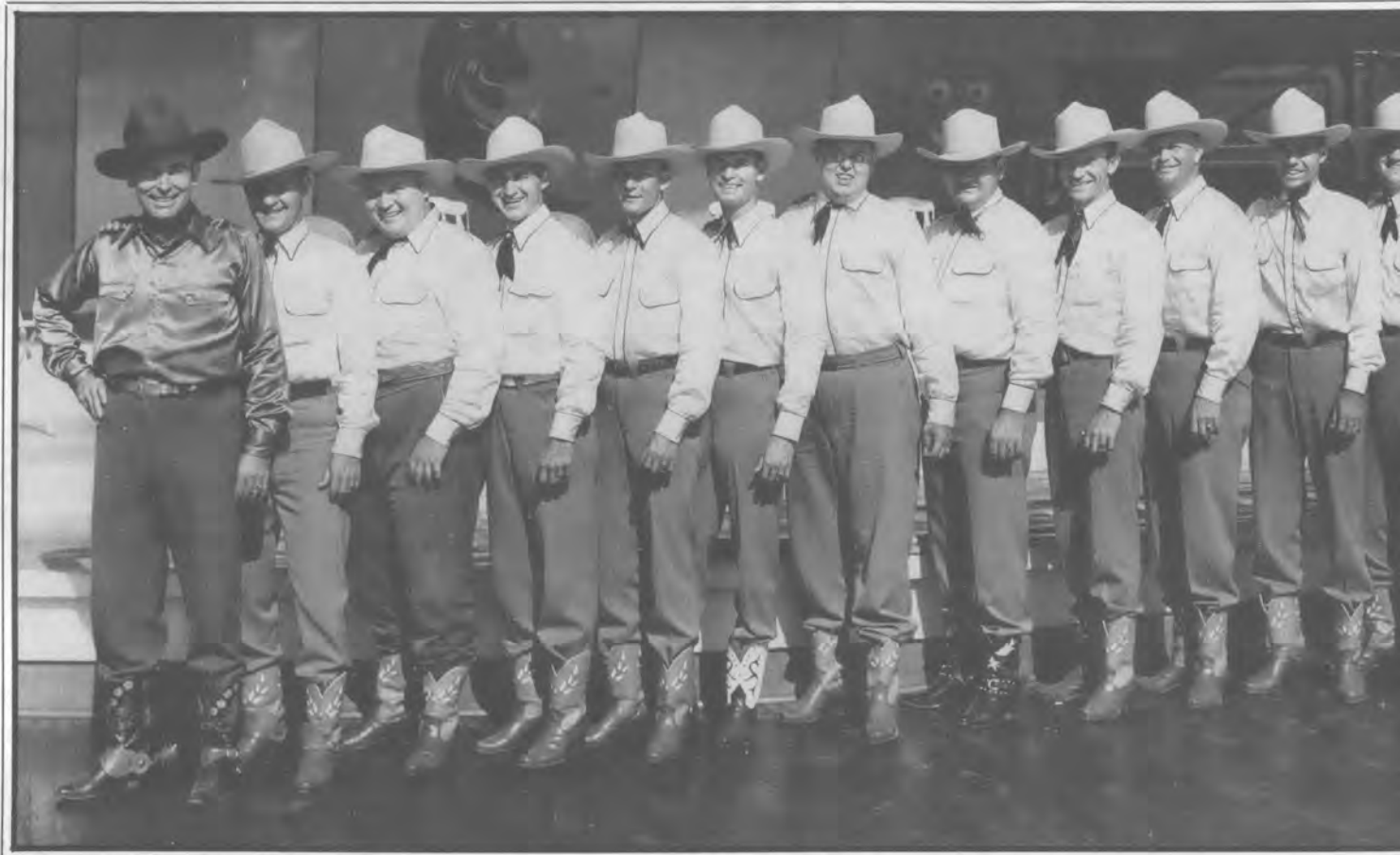
We'd have a whole lot better world to live in if some of

our preachers and teachers would help the people understand how to live together better and help one another, instead of talking all the time about rich rewards in heaven for those that suffer here on earth. Why don't they get out and suffer a little, so they can get some of that reward. The higher-ups that preach that stuff don't seem to be suffering any. □

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nothing forced or

David Stricklin



A few years ago, I happened to meet a fellow I had known from my hometown of Cleburne, Texas. He asked me why, when we were in high school together, I had never told him that my father had played piano with Bob Wills. On second thought, he admitted, it might not have made any difference to him back then.

There was a time — from the late '50s to the early '70s — when people in Texas had pretty well forgotten about Bob Wills and his music and what it meant to them. Those who remembered carried a deep feeling for this spunky fiddler and his improbable band, the Texas Playboys, with its hybrid of country and western and big band swing. The old-timers shared a legend passed around by word of mouth about the Bob Wills dance and Wills' magnetic effect on a crowd and the hard-driving way his musicians worked to entertain people beaten down by the Great Depression. But by the 1960s many people had forgotten.

Then in the early '70s came the rise of the music style called by many "progressive country." Some called it "redneck rock," because it more or less joined elements of rock music with those of country and western. Bob Wills never considered himself a country-and-western performer, but he was a hero to many of the leaders of the progressive "revolt" against the predictability and overproduction of

The Playboys in 1939, photographed at the "Blue Moon" near Tulsa. Left to right: Bob Wills; Tiny Mott, sax and clarinet; Tubby Lewis, trumpet; Smokey Dacus, drums; Jesse Ashlock, fiddle; Johnnie Lee Wills, banjo; Zeb McNally, sax and clarinet; Tommy Duncan, vocals; Everett Stover, trumpet and M.C.; Al Stricklin, piano; Joe Ferguson, bass and sax, vocals; Eldon Shamblin, guitar; O.W. Mayo, business manager; Son Lansford, bass; Herman Arnsperger, driver; Leon McAuliffe, steel guitar.

Nashville's industrial approach to music. Merle Haggard foreshadowed this trend in 1970 when he cut his tribute album to Bob Wills, "The Best Damn Fiddle Player in the World." In the process, he brought together for the first time those members of the original Playboys he knew of — but mistakenly presumed that several musicians were dead; these same musicians later became important to the band as it regrouped. Haggard's effectiveness in spreading the word about Wills' music was also limited somewhat by his "Okie From Muskogee/Fightin' Side of Me" image, which kept many of the progressive country patrons on the rock side of the border from taking him seriously.

Eventually, though, younger performers, especially in Texas, in bands such as Alvin Crow's Pleasant Valley Boys and Asleep at the Wheel, as well as innovators like Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson, showed strong Wills influences

fancy



photos courtesy of Al Stricklin



Bob Wills and his horse "Punkin." The horse survived two decades of appearances through the western U.S. with Wills, and co-starred in one of his movies.

and began acknowledging Wills as a seminal figure.

By the mid-'70s the long-hairs and rednecks had made peace in the larger cause of music. They represented a new market to the record companies, but they meant something more to the aging musicians who had played for Wills during his heyday. A core group of Texas Playboy members from the '30s and some who had joined Wills later began performing together occasionally to satisfy the clamoring of their new audience.

The revitalized Texas Playboys were led by steel guitar player Leon McAuliffe, probably the best-known — except for vocalist Tommy Duncan — of the hundreds of musicians who worked for Wills. In September, 1975, a Public Broadcasting System series, "Austin City Limits," videotaped a program featuring most of the surviving musicians who helped Wills pioneer Western swing music: C.G. "Sleepy" Johnson, who had played guitar in Wills' first string bands in Fort Worth; fiddler Jesse Ashlock, who also started out with Wills in the early Fort Worth days; bass player Joe Ferguson, who along with McAuliffe, Johnson and Ashlock had been a member of the Light Crust Doughboys before going to Oklahoma to work for Wills; Smokey Dacus, the drummer who joined Wills in early 1935; and my father, Al Stricklin, who began playing piano for Wills 40 years and

a couple of weeks before the videotaping.

The wildly enthusiastic reception the Playboys got from the TV studio audience — students at the University of Texas — was followed the next night by equal acclaim at a south Austin dance hall called the Broken Spoke. It was the first dance some of the Playboys had worked together in 35 years. Remarkably, before that mixture of old and young, the musicians discovered that they were still a band. Here were men nearly 70 years old having the time of their lives, responding to each other's improvisations, playing tricks on each other that no one off stage would notice — and, most of all, entertaining their audience with the classic Bob Wills smooth and upbeat rhythm, giving them a lot more than just music.

Bob Wills was born and spent the first several years of his life in the eastern part of central Texas, on the edges of where Texas is more Southern than Western. He learned old-time fiddling from members of both sides of his family in the strong folk tradition of Southern and mountain music. The Wills' plight as tenant farmers in the depressed cotton economy of the 1920s gave Bob a bond with neighboring blacks, with whom he played and worked, and who taught him much music. His father, it



is said, fiddled just enough to keep from farming but too little to earn a living playing at house dances on Texas farms.

While Bob was still a boy, his family moved to West Texas, where he soon developed an intense desire to escape farming and get to the city. After barbering, selling cars, shining shoes, “rough-necking” in the oil fields and passing through a variety of other jobs, he moved to Fort Worth in 1929 to organize a string band. With two to four men doing old-time, popular, novelty and blues songs, Wills’ group eventually won the sponsorship of the Burrus Mill and Elevator Company and began advertising Burrus’ Light Crust Flour on the radio. Their boss was W. Lee O’Daniel, a smooth-talking executive who later became a highly successful Texas politician. The Light Crust Doughboys, as the band was called, became embroiled in various squabbles with O’Daniel, often having to do with Wills’ problems with alcohol and the possible effects on the Burrus (and O’Daniel) reputations.

Finally, in 1933, Wills left Fort Worth to form another independent band. By that time, the Light Crust Doughboys and their rather unusual music had established a loyal audience on a fledgling radio network in Texas and Oklahoma. O’Daniel had cultivated a following of his own as the group’s announcer, reading poetry and singing tear-jerky songs of his own composition, and dispensing a brand of folk wisdom over the radio that later won him the governorship and a place in the U.S. Senate (he defeated Lyndon Johnson and 11 other Democratic primary opponents without a runoff). O’Daniel eventually used his growing influence to hound Wills’ band out of Texas by bullying their potential sponsors. So Wills ended up in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he and his band, now known as the Texas Playboys, found a secure spot on a radio station unafraid of O’Daniel, and a public that appreciated the

developing Wills style.

Pleasing the public became an obsession with Wills, but the shape of his music grew strictly from his own taste. To the original string band instruments — fiddle, guitar, bass, an occasional banjo and steel guitar — he added horns, of all things, then drums and piano. While the Light Crust Doughboys had used more or less traditionally rural instruments for both their country and urban-style music, the Texas Playboys played all sorts of music with a variety of instruments. In a single song Wills might call for solos on the steel guitar, the saxophone or trombone, one of the other fiddles, the piano or the trumpet, even a drum solo, with no sense of contradiction. At times the Texas Playboys sounded like a Salvation Army band — except they would play a song such as “Mexicali Rose,” then a Jimmie Rodgers or Bessie Smith blues tune, then a primitive sort of jazz rendition of “Old-Fashioned Love,” and finally follow Wills through an old fiddle tune handed down through generations of Anglo-American folk musicians.

It took the band many months to polish their sound, so Wills compensated by dancing around on stage, calling out lines from comedy routines in the popular medicine shows, yelling to band members or to no one in particular, and generally clowning to cover the musicians’ mistakes. Band members found this unorthodox style liberating, if sometimes frantic.

The Playboys soon developed a schedule of playing dances throughout Oklahoma, and in parts of Arkansas, Missouri and Kansas, adding occasional trips back to Texas. A number of people became regulars at Wills’ performances and let him know in various ways that they appreciated the diversion his music gave them from the cares of the Depression. Some fans tried to get him to run for governor of Oklahoma. By the late 1930s, Wills had added fairly sophis-

ticated big-band arrangements to his fiddle tunes and blues songs, so his audiences heard live many of the songs the Dorsey, Miller and Whiteman bands were playing over the radio.

The exuberance and mischief were still there, however, and the "Bob Wills dance" became legendary — a four-hour affair during which the band never took intermissions. Actually, most people did not dance, but stood in a ring around the bandstand to watch Wills and the band. Some reached up to shake his hand or wave to members of the band. Wills kept up some sort of communication with practically everybody, his black eyes exerting an almost hypnotic effect — all the while directing the band, arranging songs as he went along, keeping the musicians wondering what might happen next.

People brought babies in cribs to the dances; many invited Wills and the band to their homes for meals. Country music authority Bill C. Malone once said that Wills, the Playboys and their fans constituted a large family. Wills' first drummer, W.E. "Smokey" Dacus, observed that Wills' genius was in knowing that "there wasn't any difference in the people that came to the hotel in a tuxedo to dance to the big band music and the people that came to the string band dance in overalls."

When the war came, most of the Playboys who had gone through the Depression with Wills left for service or for

defense work; Wills also went into the Army for a time. When he got out, he re-formed the band and left Oklahoma for the West Coast; there he continued to lead a band for another 25 years, sometimes with great success. But by the late '50s his music was slipping. He had outlasted his contemporaries from the swing era, but financial problems kept him working long after he probably should have retired.

During the '60s he was forced to sell the rights to the name "Texas Playboys" and resort to hiring local musicians in towns where he made appearances. He still drew people who remembered his heyday or had heard about him from others, but the quality of his music suffered terribly. His health worsened steadily, and many Bob Wills fans had the misfortune of witnessing his physical and professional decline. He stopped performing in 1969, only after he had the first of a series of crippling strokes. He lived long enough to see his music become popular again, and before his condition left him virtually comatose, he may have realized that a whole new generation of fans was discovering his music and claiming him as one of their heroes.

The appearance of the reassembled Playboys on television in 1975 led to a number of other performances attended mostly by new converts to the Wills-Texas Playboys music. The music's magnetic

Smokey Dacus, 1977.



Smokey Dacus, now 72, recalls when he joined Bob Wills in 1935 as his first drummer and what it was like playing in Wills' bands.

At that time a set of drums was unheard of, it destroyed the atmosphere, it wasn't country. There was no place for it except in big bands, the hotel bands with a stage full of musicians. Bob was just out of his mind. Nobody — I didn't agree with it.

I thought he was crazy. It just magnifies his vision. He was the only man in 1935 in the music world that would tolerate the idea that modern popular music and country music could be molded together into a music of its own. He approached me and I said, "What do you need with a drummer in a string band? What would a drummer play?" Course, at that time in '35, you could eat all you wanted in the best places in Tulsa for 15 cents. Bob wanted to pay me \$55 a week. "There ain't nobody that makes that much money." The boys in the hotel band I played with were skeptical. Most of them made fun of me: "You're gonna play drums in a fiddle band?" And that was my biggest problem: what sounds good? So I tried to develop a sound that would fit. For \$55 a week, you'd work at it! It was his vision that you could put the two styles together into a style of music that represented everybody.

To tell the truth, my feeling at first was that I had condescended for money, to play this kind of music. But it wasn't long before I found the freedom in this kind of music that wasn't in the other music. See, the big bands that sat up there with the music in front of them, they played as if they were mummies. Their only concern was with the notes that were

in front of them. You could dance by in front of them and they wouldn't even see you. But in Bob's band — music is communication. I know a lot of musicians that you could take an ink well and throw it against that wall and bust it. And they can pick up a trumpet and play it. Wouldn't make any kind of difference what kind of mess it made, they could play it. But you put them at the end of a hundred-foot rope and they couldn't swing. No feeling.

Bob Wills music is different. Bob had no concern about — you know — the way it was supposed to be done. There were no rules for what any individual did or the whole band played. He didn't care about how it was supposed to be done, but if it's right it'll do something to you. All that expression that was written into the music was in Bob's stomach.

You also have a certain feeling about all these guys you're playing with. Strick and I were always damned close and knew it, because we were working like that every night and we played to each other's feelings every night. Strick was the only one that I was conscious of that I was close to, yet years later you find out you were close to all of them. You build bonds that you didn't realize you were building.



appeal was definitely there. Then came the surprise: the band began booking dances at some of the stops on their old dance circuit and found that the enthusiasm of the older people matched that of the young. The people who had been part of the Bob Wills movement of the Great Depression era were now responding to the Texas Playboys without Bob Wills. Their enthusiasm and the band's dedication to their audience in the Bob Wills tradition was perhaps best illustrated during an eight-hour period I observed one Saturday in April, 1976.

Bob Wills Day is an annual celebration in the Texas Panhandle town of Turkey, near where Wills' family lived after they left East Texas. It is a pretty typical small-town salute to a famous native — with music of course dominating things. In 1976 the full re-grouped Texas Playboys appeared for the first time since Wills' death the year before. Emotions were high and a lot was expected of the band. They were booked for a concert in the afternoon on an old football field taken over by the festivities, then a dance that night in an even older high school gym. That represented a full schedule for some old guys, even ones in the habit of working hard on stage.

The concert began in the bright sunlight and merciless winds of the high plains. The audience seemed to enjoy the music and the band worked well under less-than-ideal conditions on a flatbed trailer. I was in the audience that day and spent most of the time watching my father and the others in the rhythm section, especially the way my father works with Smokey Dacus, the drummer. Their never-spoken communication on the bandstand is one of the pure delights in their lives, and in mine. The way they anticipate subtle suggestions of changes in rhythm back and forth between the piano and the drums, it's almost as if they send messages to each other through the vibrations in the stage. Sometimes barely aware of the audience or the rest of the band, they still manage to keep up with the song, in fact laying down the one thing no Bob Wills song can do without: the beat.

During the last couple of songs in the afternoon concert, I noticed a terribly pained expression on Smokey's face. He would often put on a look of mock disgust to get my father going, but nothing like this. Usually he laughed and smirked like a kid. The look got worse as they neared the end of the last number the "Texas Playboy Theme." They hit the last beat and all stood to accept the applause

— then Sleepy Johnson collapsed. He dropped his banjo and lay sprawled near the back of the trailer. Some of the other Playboys left the stage before they realized anything was wrong, others tried to help Sleepy. Meanwhile, people from the audience rushed to the stage, seeking autographs. Finally, someone called an ambulance, and Sleepy was taken to the nearest hospital, a half-hour away.

By the time things calmed down and the band and their families and friends all got word of what had happened, Sleepy was dead. He had had a heart attack, stood up after the last note of the song and died. Then came the classic question for any performer: what about the dance that night? I don't recall any discussion of whether the crowd of Bob Wills faithful would understand the band's not wanting to play, or statements such as, "Sleepy would want it this way." They just seemed to know that they would play the job and make the best of it.

As the time for the dance drew near, the gym filled with many more people than had been at the concert. Acoustics were terrible, especially on the floor, and it appeared as if no one heard the first thing that came over the microphone: "We would like to dedicate this dance to our old friend and fellow Texas Playboy, Sleepy Johnson, who died here this afternoon at the conclusion of our concert." A roar went up from the crowd, which must have thought the unintelligible statement was some sort of battle cry to get the proceedings under way.

Things were rough at the start but evened out pretty quickly. From my seat on the back corner of the bandstand, I could feel the stage begin pulsating. It wasn't just the way a floor feels when something is dropped on it or the way you can sense the vibration from music being played in another room. The stage became an instrument itself, transmitting a beat as purely conceived as any I can imagine. Al Stricklin and W.E. Dacus played to each other's feelings and gave each other looks, as my mother often joked, they had never given their wives. When time came for a piano solo, Smokey would put down a special heightened rhythm he always used when my father took a break, delighting, he said, "in making Strick play over his head."

The band took a break, and Smokey explained he had realized something was wrong with Sleepy, a fine rhythm man, when Sleepy began to lose the beat during the last few songs of the concert. Sleepy was dying, but the only thing he had known to do was finish the performance.

Many of the younger men and women who helped make this music popular again have now gone on to other interests. In a sense, they have given the music back to the older people, who are a little more free now to relive their younger days without quite so many college-types crowding them for the good places up close to the bandstand. It may be that the young people never fully understood what Wills and his music meant to the people who were young during the Depression, or to the members of the Texas Playboys. It is certain, though, that in knowing something of Wills and his band, they got a glimpse of why, when a musician gives completely, it can be a time when the air is filled with more than just music. □

David Stricklin was born and raised in Texas; his father played piano with Bob Wills from 1935 to 1942. This article is drawn from extensive interviews and a Master's thesis in which Stricklin traces the Playboys' history.



Playboys Discography

Two very good re-releases of original BW-TP recordings, **Bob Wills Anthology** (Columbia, 1973) and **The Legendary Bob Wills** (Columbia, 1975) give a cross-section of the music that made Wills popular from the mid-'30s to the mid-'40s. Be prepared for some surprises.

For the Last Time (United Artists, 1973) reflects the Wills style as it had evolved by the late '40s and will be less surprising to listeners who know the Texas Playboys for their influence on later country music performers. Wills was present for the first day of the recording session, though confined to a wheelchair, but had another stroke that night which left him bedridden the rest of his life.

Bob Wills' Original Texas Playboys

Today (Capitol, 1977) was the first full Texas Playboys session after Wills' death in 1975, and was followed by **Live and Kickin'** (Capitol, 1978) and **The Original Texas Playboys** (Capitol, 1979). These three albums feature the core of the reunited Texas Playboys who are still performing together and demonstrate their philosophy since they started playing again: to play their music the same way they did the first time around. They live up to the Wills motto, "nothing forced or fancy." Especially noteworthy is the late Keith Coleman's fiddle work on the first album, probably the best of the three.

Faded Love, recorded in October, 1980, will be released by the time this **Southern Exposure** is in print by Delta Records of Nacogdoches, Texas. It represents the Playboys' long-discussed break with the country music recording establishment and marks the return of skilled Playboy fiddler Gene Gasaway.

The Best Damn Fiddle Player in the World (or My Salute to Bob Wills) (Capitol, 1970) was Merle Haggard's setting of the foundation for the Wills revival of the '70s.

The Playboys at radio KVOO-Tulsa studios, 1937. The band broadcast every day at noon over KVOO throughout Wills' stay in Tulsa. Also, their dances at Cain's Academy were carried "live" by the station at midnight on Thursdays and Saturdays.

Several former Texas Playboys worked on the album, but some, including my father, did not appear because they were presumed at the time to be dead.

Fathers and Sons (Epic, 1974) is a double album featuring *Asleep at the Wheel* and a re-release of an old BW-TP album, **Bob Wills Special**. It is an interesting document that shows the debt of the younger group to Wills and helped get vintage BW-TP recordings back into circulation.

Brother Al Stricklin Now (Texas Record Company, 1976) was my father's swing-piano message. He never got to play melody when he was with Wills, only rhythm and improvised solo breaks, so he decided to have some fun. Who set down the rhythm for his record? Smokey Dacus, of course.



drawing by Warren Johnston

duties

Kathy Meads

If there hasn't been any rain to speak of, as there hasn't been, you know a load of potatoes is coming as soon as the truck rounds the first bend, 10 acres across corn fields. If not, you have to wait for the second curve when you can actually see the truck and not just the dust that blows up from its wheels.

Depending on the driver, from that second curve it takes between five and 10 minutes before the truck is backed up to the grader, the tray that catches the potatoes adjusted to the right height, the electric motor hooked up, and the electricity switched on. On the tray the potatoes are carried by rollers to a second conveyor of hexagonal metal through which the smaller, or "B" potatoes, drop. The "A"s alone pass onto us, the human graders, and from these "A"s we throw the sliced or rotting ones, the dirt clods and compressed beer cans, grass, snakes and turtles – throw them out fast before the belt narrows and the boom loads them onto the tractor trailer which will deliver them eventually to Indiana, Ohio or Pennsylvania and to their ultimate destiny: chips.

It takes four to four-and-a-half field trucks to fill one tractor-trailer load. The most rigs loaded in one day has so far been seven; the best time we've managed for one is two hours even. But that was a day when loaded field trucks were parked next to the grader waiting on us, not a day like today when we turn again and again toward the road to see only the clear rising currents of undulating heat, no dust.

Five of us work the grader – two male, three

female. One operates the motor at the tray, the other four sort through the potatoes rolling by. Today, in the third week of digging, in oppressively still July, we are again at a stall, a stall that has stretched beyond an hour because not one but both of the diggers are broken. There have been other breakdowns: pulleys, tractors, trucks, motors, but a broken digger is the most dreaded, the one which causes the longest delay. When a driver brings in the news from the field ("one digger's broke and the other won't work," as one fellow put it), the 10-hour day we had hoped for automatically lengthens. "Lucky to get out by midnight" someone says and the phrase gets picked up and repeated again and again. Bad news for all the high schoolers who thought maybe tonight they could slip in a date, bad news for my swollen ankles, bad for the long-distance truckers whose schedules become even tighter. Worse still for the farmer who can see at least five on his payroll sit and do nothing because the dirt from beneath the grader has been shoveled, the stray potatoes reclaimed and there is nothing left to do but wait: the trickle of sweat and the trickle of money slipping away. "That's potatoes for ya," someone says philosophically, and indeed it seems to be. Into the third week, not much new gets said but there are always the appropriate repetitions. Complaints about the size of the potatoes, the heat, the dust, the tiredness. Also: feats – both engineered and imagined. "Son, you wouldn't of believed how much I drunk last night. I swear to God, son, I woke up this mornin didn't know

where'n the hell I was." There is general consternation that the season — potato season — won't end before football season begins. "Hell, I'll quit, son, I gotta have me some time to party." From the females the talk is more speculative: who of their peers is and is not careful. "She just wants to get pregnant so he'll marry her. And you know he will. That's all she wants."

Another 30 minutes pass and still there is no dust, no word as to when we can expect any. The long-distance truckers stretch out under their trucks or climb into their cabs, turn on the air conditioning and try to sleep. I walk over to the office to wait it out. The son of the owner of this operation is to be married in August, "after these potatoes are in," says his mother who is, like the rest of her family, working here six days a week for the duration. There is wedding talk to cover up potato talk: how badly the lack of rain has hurt them — 200 bags to the acre last year and this year not even 150; how much money the breakdowns are costing; the more serious cost of supplying contracted potatoes that are not in the fields and will have to be bought elsewhere at a higher price to make up the deficit. The mother of the groom will wear blue, she says; the bride's mother will be in pink. China and crystal have been picked out but no silver. Then someone outside spots the dust. "Potatoes," he calls, and we put on our gloves and return to the contraption which looks like a mechanical ostrich, but the potatoes as yet are only at the second curve.

We know who is driving the truck before we can see him because it takes Eddie Rose just under five minutes to get around that second curve and park his truck at the tray. On the last turn he makes a practice of driving two-wheeled. Even in reverse he doesn't slow down, but he is the only driver who never slams into the tray.

During the two-and-a-half weeks that I have been attending to the movements and mannerisms of Eddie Rose, he has begun each work day wearing bib overalls and a T-shirt. By the first truck load he has shed his T-shirt and by the second he has unstrapped the bib and is in danger of losing the overalls altogether. He is, as they say around here, a "big boy" although he is 20 years old and hardly a boy. The big is more appropriate: six foot at least, at least 220 pounds. Usually he farms with his father but because their peas were already planted and Baxter needed him, he's working the potato season here.

"Goddamn it's hot," he says, slamming the cab door and walking somewhat slewfootedly to the thermos from which he doesn't bother to drink; instead he pours water over his entire dust-coated face. Then he climbs up to help us. He grades without gloves and with a cigarette dangling. If he's run out of cigarettes and can't bum one, he sings Barbara Mandrell hits with the other two women. He is a devotee of the local country music station, its bumper sticker pasted on his red Ford pickup equipped with stereo and headlights. We discover amid the roar and haste that his cousin was in my high school class.

Cigarette still dangling, he cocks an eye.

"You that old?" he says.

I am.

The next question is no surprise either. Why am I grading potatoes? I have found it best to keep the reply simple.

"Broke," I say.

Within the pause he throws out more dirt clods with one hand than any of us do with two.

"Lemme ask you somethin else. You married?"

Community rumor has it on its files.

"Was," I say.

There is no need to try to cover over awkward silences on a potato grader; there are no awkward silences. There is always an overwhelming, unremitting mechanical grind.

Only occasionally, and just occasionally since I've been away from this place, do I run into an Eddie Rose. Since Jimmy Carter good ole boys have been cast into a glaring limelight and — as with all media-blitzed types — they are done an injustice. Finally they are only themselves with a few commonalities. The tendency to brag, to retain a Dark Ages concept of womanhood, annoys. But there is also a very pure and rare simplicity to be found among them, a simplicity bred from innocence — not of the rawer elements — an innocence of vision: of what things are, what they mean, what they should be. It is a simplicity and innocence the South as a region can no longer claim and perhaps because I feel it disappearing so quickly when I'm here I clutch at Eddie Roses, turning a blinder eye than I might toward annoying traits in fear of destroying others.

To say any of this to the real Eddie Rose would no doubt bring his freewheeling style of storytelling to an embarrassed halt. There is no reason to tell him. Instead I try to talk with Eddie Rose

about more than the size of potatoes or the thickness of dust. I try and perhaps because I have answered him, he answers me no matter how strange my questions may seem.

The reason he will register for the draft is that he couldn't produce the \$10,000 necessary to cover the fine should he not register. But if he were drafted he would serve. "Yeah, sure. It's my duty."

His truck is empty of potatoes and after he pours another pint of water down his face, he jumps into the cab and guns the motor, off to the fields for another load.

"Crazy fool," says one of the guys of a "boy" who has been driving tractors and field trucks and shooting rifles since he was eight. Crazy Eddie who guns the motor again approaching that second curve.

Jeremy Carl Something.

I never do catch his last name, he gives it so quietly. In the past three weeks I have seen all types of truckers; one who brought along his wife and their two little girls; one who looked like someone's Puritan grandfather, bespeckled and hunched and complaining of cold in his chest; one who wore a black studded cowboy hat; several who had tattoos; one who was accompanied by an obvious runaway and during the boredom of another stall, turned over his cab doing 75 in a 45-mile-an-hour curve, but neither he nor she was hurt. Several are so very ordinary I forget them almost as soon as they leave but it is unlikely I will forget Jeremy Carl, his blonde hair under a baseball cap, his blue eyes under sunglasses, his bafflement at the world post-Viet Nam as yet without suitable disguise.

He is not a Southerner; he is from Ohio. He says "worsh" for "wash," and the story that is pulled out of him is done so in bits and pieces by potato graders who have nothing else to do but inquire. When prodded, he tells how to dodge road regulations when driving without a particular state's license, how the potatoes are harvested in the Dakotas. But he is no storyteller. He pauses too often and too long. And he listens. And sometimes something will slip in without the twist of humor or dramatics; a son named for him, a woman who would not stay faithful, jobs that didn't pan out and finally Viet Nam because I persist.

The recitation is almost rote. He was there for 17 months. He drove a truck. One day he and his buddy drove over a land mine. It killed his friend

and six months of his memory. What he does remember is the dampness of the climate, the human feces floating in the ditches, the Viet Cong's clever trick of turning mines and sending a herd of water buffalo through before they themselves attacked.

"I don't know if I ever thought of not going," he answers. "I don't know but I don't think so."

The lights of a field truck are spotted in the gathering darkness. This last load will fill his quota and after it all of us can leave the dirt and noise and fierce mosquitoes and call it a day. The digger crew and drivers have already completed their end of things and while we pick through the last of the "A"s, Eddie Rose punches out, jumps into his pickup and barrels onto the black highway.

When the last of the potatoes drop off the boom, Jeremy Carl closes his gates, inspects the locks on his back doors, tests the lights all around and tells each of us goodbye. He also turns onto the black highway but when he does the acceleration is slower, more even; the night he drives into longer and more keen.

The last potato was dug on July 23, a week before Eddie Rose was required to register with the Selective Service System in accordance with the Military Selective Service Act and was asked to record for them his date of birth, sex, social security number, telephone number, current mailing address and to attest to the fact that he was, at least until they sent him elsewhere, a permanent resident of Currituck County, North Carolina.

By signing on the dotted line, he swore to the veracity of all foregoing statements and by doing so, also indicated that he understood the Privacy Act Statement as printed on the back of the registration form.

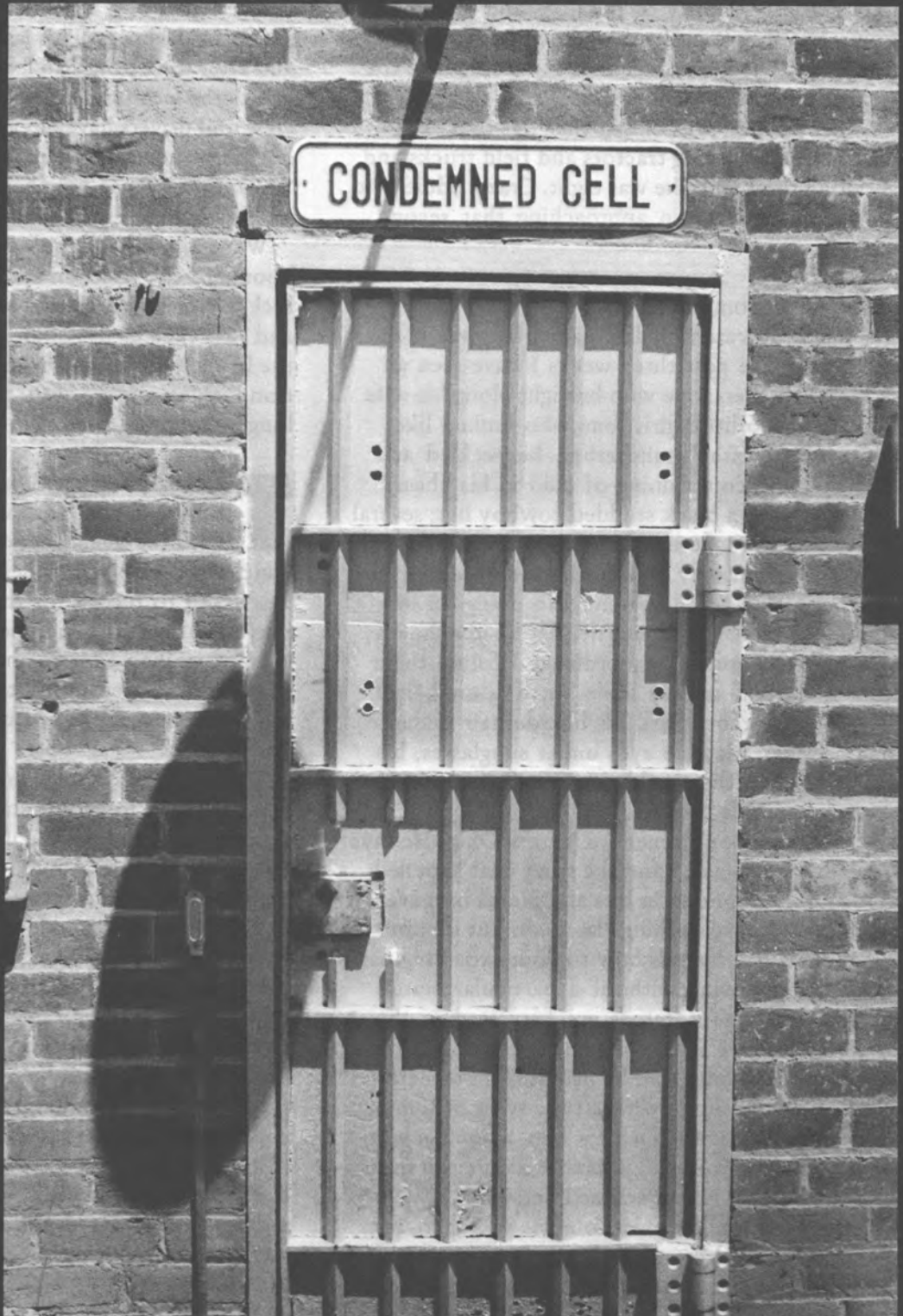
There was no space provided in which Eddie Rose or anyone 20 years old might pencil in other things they understood or didn't understand so that such information might be kept on file should memory become impaired or should one day they begin to quietly wonder about duty; about why their notion of it and everything else had somehow changed when before all had seemed so simple.□

Born in eastern North Carolina, Kathy Meads has published poetry and fiction; this essay is part of an in-progress work entitled Notes Accompanying Wanderlust.

Barely Living:

Interviews from Death Row

by Doug Magee



"I would like Governor Graham to come see me. It seems to me that if he is to judge me he should know me. He cannot know me through papers or the words of my lawyers. That's just common sense. If he had investigated my case he would be doing this. If he's so sure of himself he wouldn't be afraid to come. I know who I am. I want him to know who he is killing — the real person, not some idea he has in his head about me."

— from John Spenkelink's last statement

I did not watch John Spenkelink's execution. I stood with the rest of the press in a fenced-in meadow across from the flat, green buildings of the Florida State Prison and listened to the radio reports and then to the accounts of the witnesses and pool reporters. In the glare of bright mid-morning sun, I had trouble realizing that not more than 300 yards from where I stood a man I had come to know well in the eight months since I had first photographed him for a magazine article had been taken into an execution chamber and killed. As I listened to the details of his death his last statement played in my head like a broken record. His lawyers had to bring the statement out to the press; the prison authorities would not allow him to speak for himself. He said he wanted the governor to come and meet him, to sit and talk with him like a human being. Many who heard those words thought they were preposterous. To me they sounded like common sense.

A cream-colored hearse carried John Spenkelink's body away from the prison. The big car sped into town and I looked past the line of state troopers, the big open field, the barbed wire and double chainlink fence to the prison. Those green buildings, swimming in the warm air of a late spring morning, stayed with me for days. The distance between us and the 133 men left on death row seemed immense, unbridgeable.

I came to see the accuracy of that image. I realized, after looking into capital punishment more deeply, that the information we get about people on death row most often comes from intermediaries: lawyers, court records, journalists and social scientists. Like the people on death rows throughout the country, the people in the R and Q wings of the Florida State Prison are cut off from us and we from them.

Prison authorities say there are security reasons for this distance. I think it goes deeper than that. If the people on death row are allowed to speak for themselves, if they become human beings before us, we have to face the hard fact that we are executing human beings. The less we hear from them and about them the easier it is to pretend they are something less than human. I failed John Spenkelink because I kept our acquaintance to myself. Soon after his execution I decided it was necessary to meet more of the nearly 600 other people on death row and to bring their voices and stories across the no-man's land that separates us from them. These interviews are the result of those conversations. It is my hope that the interviews and photographs will introduce the reader to a part of our society that is closed off from public view, shrouded in a macabre mystery and romance and is, in the main, misconceived by all but the most knowledgeable.

Death row in most state prisons is aptly named. A set of small, one-person cells, segregated from the rest of the prison population in some way, the typical death row is just down the hall from the electric chair or the gas chamber.

A death row cell is usually about six by nine feet and has three closed walls. The other, barred wall faces on to a corridor. A person inside a cell can not see left or right of the cell. A mirror held outside the bars allows the inmate inside to see who is walking down the row. The room is ordinarily furnished like any other prison cell with a sink and an open flush toilet, a cot and a lightbulb. In some prisons the death row people are allowed their own televisions; in others there are wall-mounted TVs outside the cells, always on. The rest of the furnishings depends on prison rules and inhabitants. I saw no cell that looked comfortable. One, furnished only with a toothbrush, was the bleakest room I've ever seen.

Death row inmates are treated differently from the rest of the prison population. They are constantly in their cells. They have no work assignments around the prison and have the most minimal shower and recreation periods. For four days a week, on the average, they spend all but 10 minutes a day in their cells. On each of the other three days they have an hour for "recreation," which is standing in a penned yard.

They are dependent on their guards for everything from food, toothpaste and stamps to communication with friends, family and lawyers. Because they are locked away with such totality they are virtually powerless to protest their conditions or even to make them known.

Death row is set up with one thing in mind: to hold a person until execution. None of the programs of education or rehabilitation available to others in even the strictest of prisons are available to death row inmates. The prison is required only to house, feed and then kill the inmate. This makes life on death row far more depressing and meaningless than life normally is in prison. During all my times on death row, I could not shake the feeling that I was standing in a ghastly zoo organized and wholly devoted to carrying out the most sordid act imaginable. That the people in the cells were accused of similar inhuman acts seemed not relevant. We have only institutionalized the killing we so deplore.

The bulk of the interviews for the book *Slow Coming Dark*, from which these two selections are drawn, were done in the Southern states. As they were being conducted 85 percent of the 550 people under sentence of death were in those states. But the death penalty is far from a regional problem. As this is being written the Northern states are following the South's lead, copying death penalty laws from those states like Florida, Georgia and Texas which have had their statutes upheld as constitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.

All the people interviewed were under an active sentence of death at the time I spoke with them. It is only natural that we who meet these people have our suspicions. Reading these interviews we ask ourselves over and over whether those who are maintaining their innocence are innocent or guilty of the crimes for which they have been convicted. We haul out our sleuth selves or sit on an imaginary jury

and try to crack the case, search for clues, catch the criminal. Even those who admit guilt, we ask whether their remorse is sincere or whether we are being conned by someone who is desperate.

Not dealt with directly in these pages are the pain and suffering of the friends and families of the victims. I did ask most of the condemned about the victims' friends and families. In most cases the people sentenced to death had had little to do with victims' families. This is reasonable, of course, given the fact that no restitution is possible.

I did find one instance of an extraordinary exchange between a person on death row and the mother of that person's victim. Cardell Spaulding killed Roscoe Simmons with a homemade knife on the exercise yard at Central Prison in Raleigh, North Carolina. Convicted of the killing and sentenced to death, Cardell — who had been stabbed earlier by some of Roscoe's friends — thought he was just protecting himself when he struck out with his knife. The reason the interview I did with Cardell is not in this book is that after several years on death row Cardell received a new trial and his death penalty was reduced to life imprisonment.

While under sentence of death Cardell wrote a letter to Roscoe Simmons' mother saying he was sorry for what had happened and that he felt what he had done was in self-defense. With what must have been great difficulty, Mrs. Simmons replied:

Cardale,

I can't say how surprised I was to hear from you and I have taken my time in writing you back. I've asked God not to let me say any harm to you. I am a mother of two sons and two girls. I love them with all my heart. I rise them if they broke a house rule there was a price to pay. If they broke the law there was a price and most of all if they broke the law of God there was a big price and only they could pay it. I no you have a price to pay. If they kill you it won't bring my son back and it won't make my hurt hurt any less. But I'll tell you how I feel about you. Thank God I don't hate you. And I agree with you I feel the guard did have a part in Roscoe's death. But taking you at your word, you are the one who killed my son. Yes I no you almost die and I could have understood it if it was one of those boy you killed. But my son was a mile away. He had never done anything to you. And I no he alway went out of his way to make friends. He would have done all he could to get you all not to hate each other and make peace between you all.

Reggie has told me how Roscoe used to beg him not to hate you or any of the other boy. Because some day you would have God to answer to. And God only love what was good.

Cardale, Roscoe was not the first one you killed and I feel you would do it again if you had the chance. I can't ask them not to kill you yet I can't say for them to do it. I love your soul and I no your mother love you. You see I talk to your mother. I no she was hurting as I was. But she can go see you, put her arm around you. You no when I went to see Roscoe I only ask God to let me get my hand on my son one more time, not noing that one time would be in

his casket. Now all I have to touch or look at is a grave. But I have asked God to forgive you for all this. I only pray you will ask Him too. . . .

I pray someday I'll meet you in heaven. I understand you have a child, Don't you no without God help I couldn't have wrote you this. I thank God for the love he has gaving me. I no someday I will be with Roscoe in heaven. I no those last minutes he live he ask God to save him and he's in heaven waiting for his mother.

*Lucile
Roscoe Mother*

Doug McCray

Shortly after the Furman v. Georgia U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1972, which found the existing death penalty laws to be arbitrarily applied and which eventually led to some 500 people being taken off the nation's death rows, Judge William Lamar Rose of Fort Myers, Florida, called a press conference. Judges, of course, don't usually express themselves directly through the media but this was different. The Supreme Court decision had piqued Judge Rose so that he felt compelled to make his views known in an unusual way. He took the small knot of reporters outside the courthouse and, decked out in a 10-gallon hat, proceeded to throw a handmade noose over the limb of a large oak tree. He made his point.

On October 14, 1973, Margaret Mears, a 68-year-old white woman living in Fort Myers, was raped, beaten and murdered in her home. The police arrested James "Doug" McCray, a local high school basketball star who had gone on to San Diego State University in California, and charged him with the murder. Primarily on the evidence of testimony given by Otis Walker, an ex-convict who has since recanted, McCray was found guilty. After a sentencing trial the jury in the case recommended McCray be given a life sentence. The sitting judge in the case, William Lamar Rose, rejected this recommendation and sentenced McCray to death in the state's electric chair. Judge Rose made his point a second time.

At the time of this writing fully a third of the people on Florida's death row are there because the judges in their cases overruled the jury's recommendation for a life sentence. The reasons for rejecting a jury's recommendation are varied and sometimes not explained but in the McCray case Judge Rose was explicit. A death penalty was necessary, he explained, to "set an example." After his retirement several years later Judge Rose told an interviewer that he felt at the time there would be little likelihood the sentence would be carried out. John Spenkelink's execution in Florida's electric chair in May, 1979, has greatly increased that likelihood.

Doug McCray's unusual sentencing is not the only quirk in his case. After his initial conviction, a new lawyer filed an appeal with the Florida Supreme Court. Oral arguments were heard on that appeal in 1975 and again in 1977, but



as yet the Court has not ruled. On top of this extraordinary delay McCray's motion for a new trial on the ground that Otis Walker recanted has been denied.

Doug McCray's one word for all this is "shucks." That antiquated expletive, associated more with a college student in the '20s who has missed his bootleg connection than with a man under sentence of death in the '70s, peppers his conversation. When Judge Rose told McCray that he had been convicted by a "jury of his peers," McCray yelled back, "Those weren't my peers. All of the jurors were white!" His anger at the court is no less these days but the oft-used "shucks" softens it somewhat.

I had been in jail for almost three-and-a-half months before I knew that I could receive the death penalty. When my public defender came he said, "Well, Doug, what I'm going to try to do is keep you off death row." And I said, "Death row. They don't have that anymore." So he says, "Yes, they do. Florida was the first state." So I went into . . . it was like being in a state of phantasmagoria or something.

I went to the trial in a daze. After the jury deliberated, I can't remember the length of time, they came back and found me guilty. Then they retired to give a recommendation on the sentence. They took 15 minutes to recommend mercy unanimously. But the trial judge said that he would have to think about the case and I was taken back to the county jail. A month later he sentenced me to die.

How were you arrested?

My Mom and I were eating breakfast and we were discussing the crime and, shucks, you know, we said to ourselves that we didn't think anybody could do such a thing.

Apparently the guy who committed the offense had on a cast. At the time I did not have a cast but I had an ace bandage wrapped around my arm. So I was taken to the police department and questioned.

They detained me down there for about six hours and finally I became belligerent. I told them that if they didn't have any fingerprints or eyewitnesses or something like that, they had to let me go. So finally they let me go.

Three weeks later they had a guy in the county jail. He supposedly told the police officers that he saw me in the area of the crime covered with blood and everything. But since that time he has recanted his testimony and he has stated publicly that police officers took him to the crime site and told him what to say and everything.

What kind of evidence did the state present then?

Strictly circumstantial. They had this guy who stated that he saw me in the area of the crime and that I was covered with blood. And he said that I confessed the crime to him the following morning.

And so now I wait to die with all those questions there. And the only way that could be settled is for me to be given a new trial. But apparently the courts are not going to give me one because I haven't received a decision from the Florida Supreme Court yet. They've taken almost five years. I had oral arguments for a new trial in January, '75, and they've yet to rule.

Your case has moved nowhere from January, 1975, to August, 1979?

It hasn't moved an inch. Nothing. Most attorneys I've talked to about it say that it is very unusual. They're just skipping over my case to get into others. They're ruling on cases now of guys who have been here a year. I had oral arguments shortly after Spinkelink. I was number 10 when I came to death row. My appeal process should be way ahead. I should be in Federal Court someplace. But they would not rule on it. It's sitting right there.

Do you think they are going to execute you?

Honestly?

Yes.

I think so. I have tried to think otherwise, but take the South into consideration. Spinkelink was my best friend. If they could execute him for a crime as questionable as that where a crime happened behind closed doors, then, shucks, when they take my case, murder, rape, a young black charged with raping a white woman, shucks, you know my chances of survival are slim. Very slim. I just can't understand why, if they are so sure of my guilt, they won't just go and rule on it so all these doubts and questions can be answered. But they fail to do it.

What did you feel like when you first got the death sentence? Were you aware of what was happening?

No, I was not. I was taken back to the county jail and I still didn't believe it. During those first couple of years I would pace up and down in my cell. I was writing everybody trying to get answers as to what was going on. Shucks,

I recall writing my brother once and asking him, "Is this me in here?" you know, "I mean sentenced to die?" Shucks, I mean there were so many questions and I never got any answers. And I still don't have those answers.

I just can't understand the sentence of death, being sentenced to death. Shucks, I'm walking around all the time asking myself whatever happened to this great, to this once proud country, this great industrial maker. Our country is being defiled, ridiculed, spat on and everything because we're executing human beings.

I'm confronted with headaches, pains and all the time I just can't understand it. Sometimes I say to myself that death could be, death has to be better than this. The victims were not placed in a cell and kept for years and then finally told that they would die on such and such a date. Now I don't mind dying but I don't want a time and place set for my departure.

What did you feel when John Spenkelink was executed?

Oh I felt as if the entire country had failed John Spenkelink. The entire country had failed a warm, loving human being who cared for others. Society out there does not realize that they could have prevented John's execution. John wanted to live. He just couldn't understand it all. I would talk to John, sometimes all night long. He just could not understand why they were going through all of these motions just to have him executed.

And I sit back there and I watch the guys and I say to myself, "Now, how could they sentence this guy to death, or this guy." You take Arthur Goode back there. Society and even a great number of prisoners here think that he is the worst human being alive and are wishing he would be executed. But, shucks, the guy is a human being! And that in itself makes him special. He's a product of God. He's one of God's children. We are all God's children. So how can man say he should die?

My next-door cellmate is black, 24 and illiterate. I do all his reading and writing. Anyway the guy received a letter from a concerned citizen. The writer called him a human being. The guy made me read that particular sentence over and over and over. The thought of someone calling him a human being made all the difference.

The guys back there, they're poor, shucks, a great number are illiterate, they're black. We're the outcasts, the unwanted of society.

Did you ever think about that before you came here?

I felt those same emotions but I was not involved. I remember when I was younger I would read in the paper about a guy being executed. The only thing I could say was "poor guy." But being here has made me acutely aware of a great many things that I actually took for granted out there, one being human life. That is the most special thing that anyone can possess. And only God can take that.

When I was younger, in the second or third grade, Mom said I would go around the house, telling her that I would become President of the United States. After I became older and I began to see the attitude of society as far as me being black, of course the idea of me becoming President was so far-fetched that I'd say "A black President? Never!"

Death row is simply psychological brutality. You question your dignity, self-worth and intelligence. A reporter asked me how long I had been on death row. When I responded by saying 28 years she thought I'd lost my senses. From my vantage point, such as it is, it's easy to see how black people are born with death sentences.

What was your childhood like?

I was born in Sacramento, California, April 3, 1951, and my family migrated south when I was 15. I finished high school in Fort Myers. I attended junior college at Fort Myers, at Edison Community College, for two years and then I went into the service. After the Army I attended San Diego State University for one year. I came back down South to visit the family because I hadn't seen them in about three years and, uh, I'm here.

Did you go to Vietnam?

No, I went to Germany. I'm epileptic and so I would imagine that was a big factor in me not going to the war itself.

Were you happy as a kid?

Yes, I was well loved. I was well loved as a child. Shucks. I can recall my childhood as being happy. Of course we were always poor. I can recall when we had to eat grits on wax paper because we didn't have any plates. But we were always happy. Shucks, you know, there's something special about being poor and black. I can lie on my bunk back there and I can think of the times when we wouldn't have anything to eat at home so we would raid the orange grove, you know. We would haul back these sacks of oranges. And so we would eat oranges for the week.

Being poor there's a cohesiveness that's unthought of in the affluent neighborhoods.

My Mom and Dad always instilled in me the importance of getting a good education. Even though there were a great number of us — I have four brothers and three sisters — they would stress education more than anything. I could be lying in bed, you know, starving almost, and then my Mom she would come in there and say, "Doug, did you study tonight?" you know. And I always said to myself, "What's wrong with this woman? I am starving! And she's telling me something about a book."

I was pretty bright as a child. When I became older I knew that my family would never be able to send me to college. So I turned to athletics.

My mother is the strongest person and she has only an eighth grade education. But she has been a source of strength to all of us. I've always wanted her to be proud of me, you know. I remember when I enrolled in junior college. Shucks, she took me around to every one of her friends and she said, "Doug is starting college on Monday." I mean she was so proud. I was the first and only one to go. That made her so proud.

And then when I was arrested I felt more than anything I somewhat let her down. Not as far as my guilt or innocence but from the fact I was charged with such a horrendous offense. And I told her after I got the death sentence that regardless of whether I'm executed or not I don't



want her to ever feel that she failed me. I think she pretty well understood.

Do you see your family at all?

No.

How come? They're not in Fort Myers anymore?

My Dad is in Fort Myers.

Your mother and father are divorced?

No, they are legally separated. For about six years now.

And your mother is out in California?

Yeah, right. Dad is not what you would call rich. He doesn't have the funds to come up. But whenever he can save up enough money he will come up and see me. My Mom she works seven days a week as a maid trying to keep money to my attorney. After I was convicted they got all the family together and retained another lawyer. A great number of friends joined in also.

Let's see. I've been on death row five years and four months. I think I've had three or four visits all together from my family. You just can't come down from California to Florida whenever you're ready.

Let me ask you about your epilepsy. Do you have seizures now?

Yes, I'm on medication. I take 400 milligrams of dilantin in the morning and I take 100 milligrams of phenobarbital at night. But I still have seizures, especially during the summer because the hot weather makes me more susceptible to seizures. I was told by the doctor that I could possibly be bringing on my own seizures because of the worrying, stress and anxiety. I said, "Well, look, man, I got a death sentence, you know! So how can I not worry?"

An incident happened a few years back. We went to the exercise yard. When you go to the exercise yard the room to the electric chair is out there. They were cleaning the room to the electric chair. The water fountain is 10 yards from the room that houses the chair. At the time they had the blinds down, and so on my way back I looked back and saw the electric chair. I went into a seizure it frightened me

that much.

I don't think I ever thought about the death penalty that much until I saw the chair itself. And that has to be the most horrible thing I have ever seen. I get up in the morning, go to bed at night and I'm thinking of it. My cell overlooks the room they have the electric chair in. They have the light on in there. And as hard as I try not to look over there it seems as if something draws me to it. It's really like death hangs over us back there like a cloud.

I'm so sick of hearing "I wonder who is going to be next." After Spenklink's execution it has been extremely hard. I have had a great number of seizures after that. I've complained to counselors, requesting to move from that side. Even when the ambulance came in, you know, we were all looking out the windows seeing them lower Spenklink's body into the ambulance and everything. Now this has to have an effect on us back there and I think that they are deliberately doing this. Whenever a warrant is signed I go back to the morning of Spenklink's death. It comes right back and I go into an attack. I get extremely sick.

Have you had a severe attack?

Back in '75 I had an attack and I broke my collarbone. It was the next morning when they were passing out breakfast that they found me on the floor. On another occasion last year, I don't even remember what happened but I remember trying to yell out. The doctor tells me that when they were finally able to get me down to the clinic they rushed me over to "The Rock" across the street over there and they didn't have any beds so they had to rush me to Lake Butler, which is 10 miles away. He said I was almost dead. He said that I couldn't breathe. I had swallowed my tongue. I was unconscious for three days. When I got up, of course, my tongue was raw. I had bitten it.

Now that is another strike against me. Shucks, not only am I a black man with a sentence of death but when you have a medical problem such as mine it's even more destructive. Society still has this outdated idea that epileptics are somehow possessed by the devil, or evil spirits or whatever. Heck, Socrates, Aristotle, Julius Caesar and also Beethoven had epilepsy. Add Doug McCray to that list and you've got quite a crew!

Were you ever married?

Yes, I was married to a beautiful young lady from Jacksonville, Florida, named Myra Starks. We were only married for a couple of years. We had a beautiful child, a son, Donny. We had conflicting ideas about what we both wanted out of life which led to a separation and ultimately our divorce.

Does she come to see you?

No, she's in Sacramento.

Do you ever see your son?

No, I haven't seen him since I've been here. I write to him. I write to both of them. And he is such a beautiful child. He is very gifted. He goes to a school for mentally gifted kids. They're considering putting him in another program. He's in third grade but he works on a seventh

grade level. Shucks, he writes as if he's 14. I can talk to him about Mr. Carter, the SALT treaty or anything and he's up on it. Shucks, I cry a lot because of him. I can watch a ball game on TV or something, and I think of the San Francisco Giants out there where I would probably have him up in the stands with me. You know we'd be going to the ball games or I'd be taking him camping or, shucks, I love jogging. I can just see us doing all these things together. And shucks, I'm missing the best days of his life. I just feel alienated. I'm only thankful that his mother has instilled in him that he has a father. A great number of women say, "Hey, he's locked away with the death sentence" and that's it.

Can you see any situation where capital punishment might be needed?

There are a great number of cases back there that, whenever I think of them, it almost makes me vomit. I guess society is confronted with a problem that a person does something so bad that they just have to kill him. Which is a comment on society. One of man's most ugly and primitive emotions is vengeance. Capital punishment is only a short-sighted manifestation of society's frantic search for a panacea for all these problems with crime. I'm sure that Governor Graham doesn't actually think that capital punishment is a deterrent to crime.

What really gets me is that society treats capital punishment as if it's an abstract social concept. Shucks, I thought that Spenklink's execution would bring an awareness to society out there, but it seems like the popularity of the death penalty escalated with his death. Iniquity always stirs more popular excitement than virtue.

Jimmy Lee Gray

Any crime for which the death penalty is given is detestable, but there are degrees of repulsion. The first-degree murder and attendant molestation of a child makes most of us sick with sadness and hate. Even in prison, the violator of an unknowing innocent earns loathing; the child molester behind bars has reason to fear assault and can expect to spend his time in cold, withering isolation.

I am not different from others in this respect. When I met Jimmy Lee Gray on death row in Mississippi I knew he was there for the rape and murder of Deressa Scales, a three-year-old girl in Pascagoula, Mississippi. That created a prejudice in me that remains now and will not go away. But my prejudice has not brought me to the point of saying that the crime of child rape and murder should be considered a capital crime even if no others are. After spending hours with Jimmy Lee Gray I could never say that he should be put to death, even for that most horrible crime.

Jimmy's own mother feels differently. After the 1977 conviction of her son, Mrs. Verna Smith, now living in California, wrote the Mississippi Supreme Court and Missis-

issippi Governor Cliff Finch asking them not to stay Jimmy's execution. She now lobbies for capital punishment.

Jimmy Lee Gray lived with both his mother and father as he grew up but at different times. They were separated when he was eight and he and his two brothers would shift back and forth between his mother's house in California and his father's in Arizona. He speaks of his parents in cold, biting, clinical terms; he feels that they provided him with nothing and taught him anger and destructive repression of that anger. In his senior year in high school that repression could not hold back a tide of anger that he vented on his girlfriend, whom he killed in an argument.

Gray spent seven years at the Arizona State Prison for the murder. For the first several years he used drugs heavily (drug traffic in most big state prisons is quite heavy). In the last few years of his term he began a second life. He learned computer programming and worked for several state agencies with his programming skills.

Those skills carried him through his release from prison and for several years after. But he lost one job because emotional problems interfered with his work and he felt pursued by nightmarish feelings he could not control. He moved from California to Pascagoula for a computer job and in a short time he was arrested for the murder of Deressa Scales.

Death row in Mississippi is a squat concrete building on a road of work camps in Parchman State Prison on the flat, bottom land of the central Mississippi delta. On the hot summer day I arrived there the small, nearly windowless structure, surrounded by guard towers and a single chain link fence, looked and felt like a place of punishment. Big fans inside the front door failed to move air into the rows of cells but succeeded in covering every nook and cranny with a cloud of droning noise. I went into the little visiting room that had some mattresses on the floor and some screens, that were just thin horizontal bars, to separate the prisoner from the visitor. It was so hot I opened a door that opened on the yard. A flock of mosquitoes outside the visiting room buzzed a counterpoint to the omnipresent hum of the fans.

Almost oblivious to these distractions, Jimmy Lee Gray sat down opposite me across the visiting table. A thin, short man of 32, he looks much younger. He was not expecting my visit and my cameras. He was unshaven and apologized for not getting spruced up. It took me a while to tune my ear to his speech and volume. He speaks through tight lips and does so very softly. He is shy and has trouble looking up as he talks. But his embarrassment did not last throughout our conversation. At times he would make a point forcefully and directly. His anger came out at times, not in raised volume or tone of voice but in the choice of words he used to describe those things that upset him. He seemed aware of his emotional problems and informed about them by a combination of fundamentalist Christianity and books he reads on Christian psychology. He describes his emotional disturbance in very broad terms but he seems convinced that they accurately depict the causes of his troubles.

Gray could not talk about the two murders he has been convicted of. Our conversation changed immediately when



I asked about the crimes. In the case of the murder of Deressa Scales he was visibly troubled by having to think about it and could only speak about the death in the passive voice. He spoke of how the prosecution had dropped a charge of unnatural intercourse but how just having that charge prejudiced the jury. He did not deny his involvement in the crime but in talking about the murder he could not place himself in it. Clearly he had no plan to try to convince me he was innocent. I could see why a judge or a jury might not think him insane. He could talk quite clearly about the charges against him. But a combination of guilt, fear and remorse along with severe emotional problems I have not the expertise to name have made the memory of the crime much too painful to be brought out.

I was born in Whittier, California, and I spent half of my life in California and then the other half in Arizona. It wasn't just half in California first and the other half in Arizona. It was back and forth.

I was born September 25, 1948. In '56 we went out to Arizona and stayed there until Mom and Dad were divorced in the early '60s. After that I did a lot of moving around.

I had two brothers. At first we were all staying with my Dad and then they went to live with my mother. Then there was a little division out there. So they went to stay with my grandmother. My older brother had a lot of trouble.

What did your father do?

He didn't do anything. That's why I kept leaving. It seemed to me that my mother didn't do anything either.

My whole childhood and my teenage years and everything in it was miserable. There was a lot of inner turmoil. I see that now but I couldn't see it then. Even after I physically became an adult I still didn't understand what was happening. I was very lonely and I caught myself searching for love. I wanted to find love somewhere and I didn't have any peace at all.

How did your parents deal with that?

Well, I don't know because my parents, they understood very little about love either. Everything we did was motivated by emotions and things like that. So there was very little control over any of our lives. My older brother was under a lot of emotional stress most of the time. I was under a great deal of emotional stress because my environment wasn't one of love.

I looked around me and I seen a lot of anger and a lot of bitterness and a lot of hatred, a lot of envy and jealousy and fear and all these things. Somebody said children live what they learn and that's true. I grew up not being able to trust anyone and being afraid of everyone.

I seen all these things happen around me and now, inside, way down inside I knew that these things were wrong but still I saw them going on around me and I said, "Well, maybe they're not wrong. Maybe I'm wrong." And so it was easy for me to justify punching my brother in the nose when he tried to hurt me or something like that. My older brother and I fought a lot.

I got my share of abuse with a big, thick, leather belt. My parents would go through the day and they'd collect up all these anxieties and frustrations and what-have-you. I didn't want to do nothing wrong if my brother had done something wrong just before me cause they would build up a little bit, you know. I don't just get punished for doing that wrong. I get punished just because they've got a lot of anger and bitterness and all these things built up inside 'em. And so I'm really getting punished more than I ought to for this stuff.

But I'm an introvert and the worst kind of introvert, too. Reality is painful and so I just withdraw from it into little fantasies. They were just kinda like daydreams, really. But it was a better life, no complications, you know.

I wanted to do something to help people. I always felt that way. I wanted to change the world and make it a better world to live in. So I was always doing something like that; writing songs cause I used to play the guitar. Anything that would give people positive emotions instead of some negative ones.

How did your schooling go?

Well, I was in my twelfth year, my second twelfth year at Parker High School in Arizona when I was arrested for murder out there. I was 19 at the time.

It was like down through the years we build up all these anxieties and frustrations. That was in December of '67. I went to Los Angeles to spend Christmas with my family. I got there and everybody was fighting and arguing and it was just miserable. Christmas to me should have been a

time of love, you know. And I left early and I went back to Parker and my high school teacher took me to Wyoming with him to spend Christmas with his family.

That was the most enjoyable Christmas I ever had. And on the way back I was thinking how I really hate to go back to this. And we passed by the Utah State Prison. I looked at it. I didn't say nothing to my friend. But I looked over at him. He was looking at me, you know. And I think he knew something was wrong, too.

Well, we wasn't back from Wyoming but a week and I murdered my girl friend. We had gotten into an argument and she had kind of a wild temper and she hit me and I just blew up. I couldn't . . . for several . . . I didn't even know that . . . in a way I justified doing that, you know. I thought it was right to do that. And in another way I didn't think I did it at all. It took me a whole year for the realization to finally sink in.

I don't doubt that I loved the girl. I think I really did. But the emotional problems at the time and everything at the time it just had my head so messed up that I couldn't think.

I went to Arizona State Prison for seven years. The first three years I wasted pretty much. I got into drugs and stuff like that.

In the prison?

Yeah. I had never messed with it too much, well about maybe two or three times I had smoked some grass, but I didn't really care about drugs or drinking or sex, either, really. Those are the things that I did just to feel accepted in social groups because I didn't feel like a part of the group. I've always had a lack of self-esteem, really.

I did some acid in prison and, uh, too much, I think, and smoked a lot of grass and shot up a lot of junk and stuff. But my last four years in prison I seemed to get myself together a little bit. I knew I had a problem, a very severe emotional problem.

Well, I learned how to program computers. I graduated at the top of my class. During those four years I programmed for the State of Arizona. They had two computer systems. I programmed those. I did some work for the Department of Corrections and for the Department of Health.

When I got out of prison I got me a job with a company called Comtax Corporation in El Segundo, California. They compute income tax returns. After I'd been out for a while those problems, little problems, started to develop and my emotional problems started to get worse. I noticed that I couldn't any longer concentrate on my work. It takes a lot of logic when you're writing computer programs. And so that's what happened. When I get emotional, my logic just falls all apart.

Did you start using drugs again?

No. I smoked a little marijuana every now and then, maybe on a social occasion, but I never cared anything about it, about drugs or anything. I always wanted to know where I was and what I was doing. I was really afraid of them, you know.

How did you get from El Segundo to Mississippi?

Well, I lost my job out there in California. I couldn't tell my boss what was the problem. He asked me. He gave me a good chance to save my job but I just couldn't tell him what was wrong with me. He asked me if I needed money and I said, "No, I don't need any money."

I was working on the Colorado individual returns and he called me in one day and, after he had taken a look at the program and it wasn't working at all, he said, "We're going to have to let you go." In a way I felt kinda bad. I was a little scared. But I was glad. I was glad to be out from under that pressure cause it was constantly bothering me. I'd go to work in the morning worrying about whether he was going to fire me or whether he'd say something to me.

Was there anywhere you could go to get help at this point? Did you try to see a psychiatrist or something like that?

No, I didn't try to do that. When you're under pressure like that you don't think about things like that. You're looking for ways of escaping. It's like Christianity. There are so many people running around out there with problems and they're looking for all these little escape routes. But there isn't but one and that's Jesus Christ, right? And he's right there for everyone to see. But nobody sees him.

You didn't see him at the time, I take it.

No. I even went to church one time with my uncle but that was cause I wanted to get together with him and play a little music. I wanted to show off my new guitar. But I didn't know nothing about Jesus.

And there was too many other little ways of trying to avoid reality. Lots of times what I'd do I'd get in my car and I'd drive and drive for hours and hours, you know. And I'm not going anywhere I'm just driving. It's a wonder I didn't get arrested out in California before I came to Mississippi. I think I would have been a lot better off out there.

What happened in Mississippi?

I moved to Pascagoula. While I was in California I got a job with a company called Programming Methods, based in New York. They sent me to Pascagoula. I was working for the Ingalls Ship Yard and their little claims project. I helped write statistics they needed to sue the Navy.

That was interesting for a little while but as I say problems evolved. I think if no problems had come up I would have created problems. I just got under a lot of pressure, I guess. And I started doing things that I shouldn't have been doing.

I was arrested for . . . well I'll tell you what they say I did. They say that I kidnapped and raped and murdered a three-year-old girl. They had an indictment one time that charged me with unnatural intercourse. I know these people know that that never happened. We got em to drop that but we can't get em to just leave that subject alone at all. See they need that. It's prejudiced the jury cause when the jury hears something like that, you know, it just makes them sick. They say, "Well, this guy . . . this guy is . . . let's give him the death penalty."



Were you aware of what was happening?

I don't know. I wasn't . . . I'm not really, well . . . I'm aware that this child left the apartment complex with me. Now that is kidnapping, O.K. At the time it wasn't kidnapping to me. I didn't think it was kidnapping. And I certainly didn't intend for that child not to come back, you know. I wasn't really aware of how . . . I wasn't aware of what happened out in Arizona too much, you know.

How did you feel about the girl?

I felt bad. I still feel bad about it. It's still a really painful thing for me. When I do think about it, you know, I realize that I'm responsible because if I hadn't taken her away she wouldn't have died, see. And when I think about that that hurts me a lot. Because I've always liked children and this one, she reminded me a whole lot of my niece. My niece was only two and I hadn't seen my niece in a long time. But it just hurts a lot.

How did your family respond to it?

Well, my mother responded by writing a letter to the Supreme Court and asking them not to stay my execution.

My older brother, he's in a convalescent hospital out in Los Angeles. He's nearly a vegetable. My youngest brother, he doesn't write to me anymore. My Dad, when I was arrested in Arizona it was reported to me that he said, "I don't want to get involved." So that pretty much ended that relationship.

But as I was growing up I never knew I had a mother and father. And just all these little things that happened during the years just confirmed what I felt inside. I just didn't have a mother and father, nobody that I could turn to or talk to. I wanted to feel close to my father but he just never gave me nothing to feel close to him about.

How did it affect you when your mother wrote and said she wanted you executed?

I didn't hear about it for a while but when I did hear about it I suppose I . . . well I was a little amused, in a sense. And I was embarrassed, and angry and bitter. There's a lot of bitterness in me right now.

You were amused? That's kind of a strange emotion for that kind of thing.

I thought it was in a way. I don't think it's funny anymore because there is something seriously wrong with her. The family on her side has a history of mental illness and disorders and stuff like that. In the words of my grandmother, "They were a bunch of lunatics." I think she's disturbed mentally and emotionally. She tried to kill herself three or four times.

If your sentence was commuted do you think you should be let out?

I think I should get some help before they do anything. I asked them for help in Arizona. And they gave me a psychological test. The results were that I had a 95 percent chance of marked disturbance and a three percent probability of moderate disturbance and a one percent probability of mild disturbance in a given situation. So that leaves one percent of no disturbance at all. If there's a problem I'm going to be 95 percent disturbed about it, you know. And that's true. I see little problems as great big ones and they're really difficult for me to overcome. But I think that that can be fixed. I'm sure of that. And I've done quite a bit just by reading God's word. But there is still something deep down inside that I've got to . . . It's just going to take time to work it out. But I believe it is possible for me to have some control over my life instead of being shoved around by these emotions all the time.

Have you ever felt that you had to pay for your crime?

I always believed that if somebody did something wrong they ought to pay for it. I always believed that way and I'm not going to change now. I have never been in favor of the death penalty because I think that there are a lot of people that can be helped in this world if somebody would just stop and do something with them. I don't think they should put anyone to death.

Do you feel you are going to be executed? Do you think about the gas chamber?

Naw, I just get up in the morning. I usually wake up with a headache because I got a problem with my neck. But I don't think about the gas chamber. When they were working on it, fixing it up I thought about it but it was just a passing thought. When one of the other fellows' execution date comes up and there's a scheduled execution I think about it more and it makes me nervous. I don't want to see any of the guys back there going to the gas chamber.

There were times when I actually felt it would be better if I were executed. I just couldn't go on. But that was like when I was first arrested. I don't know. I don't think I'm going to be executed. I just don't believe that to keep going. I think that it's in God's hands and I really believe that. I think that whatever He wants that's going to happen. But I don't think I'll be executed. I think I can do too much good for this world. Even from prison I can do good. I can write, maybe help somebody. Maybe somebody will have similar problems and they'll read a book that I've written or something. Maybe it'll help them understand themselves.

You talked about getting involved with Christianity. People on the outside look at that sometimes as a way for someone on death row to try to save their neck.

Jailhouse religion. Well that's true. People, you know, they need the love. First place they need to believe there is something more after this life. But there are some who are just kind of devious and they say, "Well, I'm going to read this Bible and learn all about it and I'm going to get me a minister's license while I'm here in prison." And people out there are going to see this and they figure it's going to get him off.

God controls all of these things. I'm not going anywhere unless God wants me to be there because it's His will that's being accomplished in this world today. He's even in all of the evil that's happening. God's not evil but He will allow something to happen to bring some good out of it.

I was arrested in June '76 because God wanted to get me in a place where I couldn't move and get away from Him anymore. When I was out there in the world there was too many places I could go, too many things I could do, you know, to escape from reality. See me being in jail I can't move around. I can't go anywhere.

Do you suppose you're going to have to spend the rest of your life in prison?

I don't know. I really don't know. I want to make the best of my life wherever I am. I'm trying to mature mentally and emotionally now. That was the problem I had when I was growing up. I didn't have any help. Nobody encouraged me to say anything. My parents said children should be seen and not heard. I never learned how to express myself. I just held these things inside. Even if I do spend the rest of my life in jail I can do some good. I think I can help.

Do you think you should be in a hospital?

Yeah, I'd be better off in a hospital. Just to get some help and not just to get out of paying for anything I might have done. I don't know about this Mississippi State Hos-

pital. When I went down there it looked like the place was a mess. And it didn't look to me like they were doing anything but prescribing medicine for people, maybe zap em with some electricity every now and then to kind of shock em out of something.

I been down there twice. The first time I refused to sign a commitment paper because I thought they were going to try to get me all drugged up or something and I'd be a zombie when I left. They didn't even bother examining me. They want to know how smart I am. They want to know if I know I'm charged with a capital crime and that I could get the death penalty. As long as they know that then they figured they can take me to court. They don't want to know what my state of mind was at the time of the alleged crime or anything like that.

I've been looking at myself from a psychological point of view. I've got a Christian psychology book back there that I'm reading and it's helping me quite a bit. I think I got a pretty good understanding of myself. Now what I need to do is fix the problem. I built the machine and I crash a lot because I'm dealing with positive ideals on one side and negative on the other. All my fears and everything on this side. All my desires to become a better man on this side. They're just warring against each other. When I try to make those ideals a reality in a negative society like this prison I'm already shot down before I get the ideas out there.

Nobody's following their conscience anymore. Everybody's being their own God. That's the way I did so many years. My emotions were pushing me around. My conscience would tell me don't do something and I didn't understand what the conscience was all about. My conscience would say, "Don't do this," but to me my conscience was saying, "You're afraid." Now I looked at that as being fear and fear to me was something to overcome. I grew up thinking a man was supposed to be big, hard-working, strong and afraid of nothing. So I was trying to overcome all these fears and all the time I'm doing stuff that I shouldn't be doing. It was a challenge to me and I had to overcome that fear. I understand it now. □

Doug Magee is a free-lance writer and photographer. He has covered the death penalty controversy for several years. These interviews are drawn from his book, Slow Coming Dark, copyright ©1980 by The Pilgrim Press.

In Louisiana in 1978, the owner of the "Welcome Home Ranch" pleaded guilty to holding two Mexican workers shackled in leg chains until they paid off a debt by working in the fields. In Columbia, South Carolina, crew-leader Larry Wilson pleaded guilty in federal court to kidnapping and enslavement. In August, 1980, Tony Booker, a crewleader in eastern North Carolina, was tried and convicted on the charge of slavery. His two camp "assistants," known to many migrants as his henchmen, were also under federal indictment for the same charge.

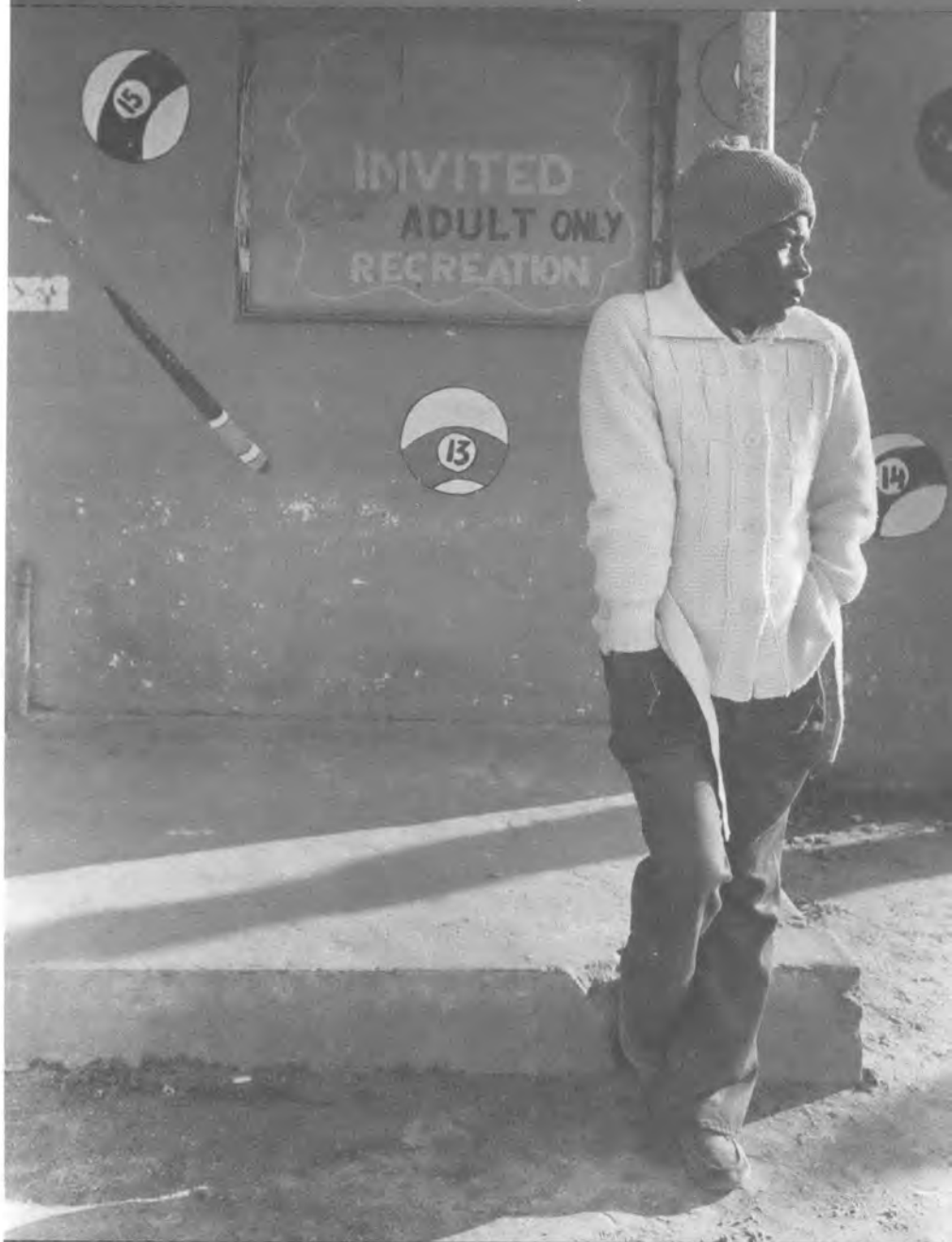
These incidents are far from unique.

Brutality in migrant camps and in the lives of migrants is a matter of course; it is the single most important factor defining their experience. The coercion may not always be as blatant as physical restraint. Control through dependence on alcohol, financial bondage or the worker's lack of perceivable job options is just as effective.

The hardships of inadequate housing, health care, sanitation, legal aid, employment benefits and wages are well documented. Behind these statistics and grim conditions lies the reality of the people who do migrant labor — people who, by the very nature of the system, are among the most marginal, outcast, unrepresented, unwanted human beings in our society. The migrant labor system demands the least protected, most desperate workers and refuses to let those who enter change that enslaved condition.

Migrant farmworkers follow three major "streams" through the crop-fields of the United States. One begins in the Baja California region and goes up the Pacific Coast to Washington State. The second originates in Texas, splits in two, then spreads out through either the central states or along the Atlantic Coast. The third starts in Florida and follows the Atlantic Coast northward. Most migrants are either blacks (primarily from Florida) or Hispanics. There are relatively few whites in the "stream," and a growing number of Haitians. Lately, an increasing number of Mexican-Americans and undocumented workers have been working the Atlantic route; they now compose about half the workers in that stream. By far the largest portion of migrants working under crewleaders are the undocumented (so-called "illegal") workers and blacks. The larger the farm, the more likely the owner

Lost in the Stream



will use migrants hired through, and disciplined by, a crewleader; the extra cost of a middleman is justified to owners because the crewleader shields them from legal liabilities ranging from collecting social security to maintaining liability insurance on vehicles transporting migrants to being charged with enslavement.

Somewhere between 1.5 and 1.6 million migrant and seasonal workers harvest farm products in 42 states. This number does not include short-term, imported farmworkers who are shipped into a given area by landowners and then returned to their native land under conditions monitored by the U.S. Government. For example, some 9,000 West Indians travel by chartered plane each year to spend up to six months cutting sugar cane in South Florida.

All these workers, whatever their color or native origin, have one thing in common: they work in the fields, with little power over their day-to-day fate, because they have found no other options, because the alternatives they face are even worse — starvation, crime and ultimately jail, living in a mental institution, abandoning their families. . . . In the following pages we present a multi-faceted portrait of the world of migrant workers. The interviews were conducted by Alma Blount and Martin Gonzalez (who also helped us with this introduction). Steven Petrow's profile surveys the conditions surrounding Jamaican cane cutters in South Florida. Interspersed throughout are Jerry Eisner's photographs of Mexican and black workers in Florida. Though vastly different cultures are represented here, we believe these sections also reveal the disturbing similarities in the lives of migrant farmworkers which make a fundamental change in the system necessary.



When a man is down and out, when he has no transportation to get himself back and forth to a regular job, and there's no proper bus system to get him back and forth, then he's kind of stuck. So he's willing to take any kind of a job he can get, if

there's a roof over his head and three meals a day. Even though it's only minimum wage, he don't care, he just wants to work, he wants to eat and wants a roof over his head. He don't want to end up in jail every other week, drunk.

So he wants to work. But his hands are tied because he don't have transportation. So he's willing to do anything: crop tobacco, pick peaches, anything, pick cabbages, tomatoes, anything, he'll go from one to the other. That's the way people get on the migrant stream. They're down and out, that's how they usually start.

But you see what they do: they get you started, and they keep you broke. You get in the hole and you don't get out. You're flat broke. You can't get to the store, you're too far away from the store unless they ride you there, or you take a chance hitchhiking — and then another guy is just going to pick you up and hijack you and take you to his camp, that happens all the time. Or the cops will pick you up if you're hitchhiking — you just ain't supposed to leave that camp!

So you live on the camp and that's it.

If you don't drink and you don't smoke, you can try to save up your money and skip out.

I've been doing farm work off and on for a couple of years; for the last year I've been working on it steady. I've stayed with tomatoes in Plant City, Florida, that was pretty good. Then I went to oranges, in Crescent City. I worked for a colored guy there, but he was good to work for. But he's really just another one — they're all the same when it comes to booze — he'd make \$2,000 a week at least on just wine and beer. There may be 50 guys on the camp. He makes five dollars a piece with them at least, and that's every day.

I got involved with this here crew when they picked me up at the Mission, "Daily Bread." That's where they pick everybody up.

This was in Orlando, Florida. Everybody goes to Daily Bread to eat at lunchtime. It's a free meal. This is where they came and ask you: "Well, do you need a job? We're going to pick peaches, pick oranges or crop tobacco. We'll take care of your wine habits, or your cigarettes, whatever you need, we've got it — three meals a day and a nice place to sleep. You want some wine now? We'll give you some wine

now. You need cigarettes? We'll furnish that too, on the way."

You ask them, "You got good food?" "Oh yeah," they say, "we've got the best."

Now the person who's doing this is not necessarily the crewleader. Most crewleaders have one guy whose job is just to go out and pick up men. He may do odd jobs around the camp, but every week his main thing to do is to go out, every week, and to send a van for more men. Because every week there are at least a half a dozen men leaving the camp. Either they disappear or they're short of money and they can't take it so they take off.

Now when I was coming up here, I never got a bite to eat. They brought us something to drink and some cigarettes, but all the way from Florida they never gave us one sandwich or nothing. The trip took over 12 hours.

By South Carolina we were starting to think we'd done the wrong thing. We were getting screwed. But we had no choice then. We were all depressed, we didn't have no work, we had all tried the labor pools in Florida and they just weren't hiring that many.

That week in Orlando before they'd picked me up, I'd had only one day of work with the labor pools. Now you're only allowed two days at the Mission and one day at the Salvation Army to stay. But if you don't have a job, soon you're out on the streets with no money and no place to stay. So you sleep underneath the bridge or in the bushes, and hide where the cops won't pick you up. Sooner or later you get tired of that, so you start selling your blood plasma, anything to get money, anything just to keep alive. So if somebody comes by and offers you a job, you take it!

Now you kinda know half of what they tell you is bullshit, but you expect them to feed you at least, and you know that you can run a bill for wine and cigarettes.

Now by the time we got to the camp, it was the next morning before we got anything to eat.

When we got to the camp, there weren't any beds made up. We had to put beds together. There were dirty beat-up mattresses with holes in them, but they did give us sheets. (They didn't give us no blanket.) It was crowded. The room couldn't hold more than eight people, but we had 10. They were putting them on top of one another.

We started working the very next day. We were priming tobacco. We were pulling em from the bottom of the stalk, sand lugging. Then we'd go back the next week and hit the middle with another four or five leaves, then come back later again and get the top leaves.

It's tremendously hot work and there's no breeze. You wear the dirtiest clothes you can wear. You try to cover yourself up good from the sun.

We primed for the whole month of July just about. It wasn't until August that we started getting to the middle of the stalk.

Now some of these farmers treat you nice. They bring out some pop maybe at 10 or 10:30. But some places were real bad. You wouldn't get a break or they wouldn't bring out nothing. Sometimes you wouldn't even get water for hours.

You'd ask for it, and it would take them an hour to get a canteen of water out. And they'd set it at the end of the road, and you might have to travel a mile to get it.

Lunchtime they'd give you two pieces of bologna with bread. We were lucky. They included our lunch in the \$35 a week we pay for food. Some places charge extra.

I got my first paycheck that Saturday. I'd come on a Monday night, worked Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday of that week. I believe I had something like 33 hours. I was supposed to have been making \$3.10 an hour. They took out for social security and \$35 for board. I think I owed them \$37 or so for liquor. I only got \$12 or so out of the deal.

Now when they pay you, sometimes they'll take you to the store, but you can't leave, they'll tell you you can't leave. They'll say: if you're going to be getting in the van, you've got to be coming back.

I didn't ever attempt to leave, you get the feeling there are henchmen there ready for you if you try to leave. If you just want to take off and leave, you better be looking over your shoulder, because there's going to be someone there waiting to pick you up.

I'll tell you: the men on the camp fight with each other. Somebody cutting somebody's throat ain't unusual. If you don't watch everything they'll steal your socks, or they'll steal your pants; this goes on constantly all the time.



The men fight with each other because they're nervous. They're unsatisfied with what they're doing, they owe the boss money, and they're just not making it.

Sometimes there are fist fights, or they grab a pipe or anything they can get their hands on. I've seen a couple of heads broken.

I never went to sleep unless I had a brick in my hand, ready to defend myself.

We had whoring on the camp, but we didn't have as much of it as other camps do. Sometimes they'd come around at one or two in the morning. They'd knock on the door and just come walkin in. The woman I knew would take you for whatever she could get. Sometimes it'd be \$5, sometimes \$10. You'd pay on the spot, they didn't add it to your bill.

Some camps would just have bang-up jobs. Like the camp I was on in South Carolina, the crew boss told the girls, he said, you're here to screw, and he told the men: that's what they're here for and you can do whatever you want with em. And he told the girls this is what you're here for and if you don't like it you can get your ass out. He told the guys: grab one you want and take it in your room.

Most weeks I worked I came up short and I'd have to borrow money from the boss. If I'd borrow \$5, it would cost me \$10 to pay him back. He always charged double.

I was afraid to leave owing money cause I knew I'd get my head busted that way, so I waited till I was even with the books and I had paid my bill and I had \$5 left, and I just walked off.

— interview by Alma Blount

that would take him to a city in Michigan where his brother lived. He got the ticket from one of the local social service agencies that work with migrants. He had no other money and nothing he could say he owned. His wife, he said, did not want to hear from him. I asked him how he started migrant work.

This guy picked me up and told me there's better work down here, started messing around and when I woke up I was in South Carolina.

I was living in Memphis at the time with my wife.

I met him up to a liquor store, I think it was a Thursday morning. This guy said, "What you doing?" I said, "Nothing, right now."

He said, "You want to make some money?" I told him, "What kind?" He said, "I want you to come to South Carolina with me, you can make yourself \$400-\$500 a week."

I told him, "I don't know," you know, told him I had a wife and two kids. He said, "You want to ride around with me?" I said, "Yeah."

Got to riding and when I woke up I was in South Carolina. Don't know his real name but they call him Candyman.

When I woke up the next morning I was *lost*. He asked me was I willing to work and pick some peaches. I said no, I didn't feel like it.

He said, "Come on, you can go out there and do the best you can."

I picked up 60 — 60 that day, baskets, whatever you call it.

He said, "When you get ready to leave you can go home."

I said, "How'm I going to go home if I don't have any money?"

He said, "You'll just have to stay down here with us."

I want to go home, I wanted to go home ever since I been down here.

Five dollars a week, that's all I ever got. I stayed with him about two months, something like that. The crewleader's name was Joe Brown, that was one of his assistants I guess.

You got 40 cents every time you filled out one of those little old sacks. I filled 60 the first day. I thought they were honest, just like most people I been working for. When I drew five dollars I knew there was something wrong then.

You had to pay \$2.50 for a plate for food three times a day. We didn't pay no rent, just for the food, beer

was about 90 cents. Five dollars for a pint of shine, \$2.50 for wine. I never did see the book, he could have put down anything. He just called you in there and handed you five dollars.

When I left there he come over to the next place and told the guy I owed him \$50 for the beer and wine. I went across the street to another camp, there was another camp across the street from it. He come over and told that man I owed him \$50. That man's daughter paid him off.

He [the second boss] treated me right; I got to drive the truck. He gave me \$135 a week, room and board was free. I cleared about \$25-\$30 a week.

Why didn't you go home then?

He kept telling me to stay, you know, I'd get over: on a camp, man, you can't get over. You turn around and hear all that stuff and you look up and someone's fighting. First thing you want is a drink so you can get to sleep.

— interview by Martin Gonzalez



I'm owed four weeks of back wages. But it's inconsequential. He knows and I know that he owes it to me. I'd rather not bother with litigation to try to get it back. After all, I've been with the man for 11 years. We carry on a kind of thing with each other. He's a friend, basically.

We have a thing: all I want is enough for cigarettes, for a couple of beers, and I'm okay. I'm willing to say it's my fault with this money business. I'm willing to just let it go. It sounds like the man's ripping me off, but he isn't. Listen, he would've paid me. I just didn't collect. I don't know why.

I've got an honorary degree, from the University of Montana. They gave it to me because I have so much *je ne sais quoi* — so much know-how, in literature, in English.

I didn't go to high school but I've got a high school equivalency, I got it while I was in jail.

I've been doing migrant work since 1968. They said, "Hey, fellow, you wanna pick some oranges?" I'd never even seen an orange tree. They told



Tom Williams (not his real name) has been "doing the migrant work" for about one-and-a-third years. For the last week he was living in a house which he said "wasn't worth the ground it was built on." The windows were all broken, the door would not shut and the roof leaked. As we talked, he was waiting on a bus

me, "Well, all you have to do is handle the ladder." I've been pickin oranges ever since. Except sometimes I come up a little late and pick sweet potatoes.

I've worked in steel mills, lumber camps, foundries. I've done metal work. I can paint with either hand.

I wouldn't say I'll never go back to migrant work.

Somebody has got to feed the population.

I guess I could've had a farm if I'd wanted one. I was born in Idaho. I was the only son. My father died in the '30s. He was Indian and my mother was French.

I never really knew what my father did for a living. He was a no-good S.O.B. is all my mother ever told me about him. He was seldom home. I've got two living sisters and that's all. I'm 57. I never got married. No, not me.

I feel very proud to be a migrant. I'm putting the meal on your table.

And besides that, it's good outside work. I haven't had to work in a factory now for 12 years.

I've liked my job and I don't feel bad about it, even though I never got the four weeks of pay. I didn't get it because I never asked for it.

What do I need money for, tell me that? I never did mind not having too much cash money because it's too dangerous carrying cash money around with you on the camp.

I don't regret having been a migrant. I don't feel degraded. I'll probably do it again. Somebody has to do it.

— interview by Alma Blount



We were in front of the city mission in Jacksonville. We'd just left the labor pool and we were waiting to begin cutting sugar cane in October in Fort Lauderdale. So we were between jobs and we were low on money.

While we were standing in front of the mission, two black men drove up in a van. They said, "Does anybody want to go to North Carolina to pick sweet potatoes?" I said to myself, well, we can go up there for three



weeks and then get on back here and do sugar cane.

I asked them, "What are the living conditions there?" He said, "We've got a good camp. It's clean. We've got good food. We charge you \$5.00 a day for board and room and we're paying 45 cents a bushel." He said we'd be near a town called Benson which is not too far from Fayetteville.

So he got about eight fellas and we left. We drove until about 2:00 p.m. and when we got to the camp, this guy put me in room number 10 with about seven guys. He gave me a sheet to put on the bed but the mattress was all black and damp, and had holes in it. The cement floor was all wet.

But we went to sleep. At about 5.30 in the morning they got us up. We stood in line for about an hour to get something to eat: some grits and a piece of pork on a paper plate. There was no dining room. We had to stand outside in the rain to eat. (We could have gone back into our room but it was so dirty in there we didn't want to.) In order to get coffee, we had to get an old tin can and wash it out and use it as a cup.

Then the crew leader came and he said, "I don't like to put anyone out in the field when it's wet like this, but I've got some sweet potatoes that are already dug up and we're gonna have to pick."

So this went on, but it rained so hard the next day, and the conditions of the camp were so bad — like there was no place to take a shower, they only had an outhouse, no toilet facilities, and they were charging us \$5.00 a day for this! — we were going to leave.

They said, "Well, you owe us money you know. If you'll just stay," they said, "soon you'll be able to make some money."

But we were disgusted. So we decided that we'd better just leave.

I'd heard that they'd take you up to North Carolina and wouldn't pay you, that they'd take you out in the woods and keep you on that camp, but I wanted to find out for myself if it was true. You know, you can't believe everything you hear.

I've worked migrant work all over the United States. I was in Yuma, Arizona, last year; I picked lemons and lettuce. I've picked apples in Oregon and Washington. In California I've done grapes.

In the five years I've been doing

this, I've never seen anything quite like this. I've never seen it this bad. This is the worst I've ever seen!

I was a supervisor in a men's clothing factory before I got into this work, in Richmond, Virginia. I supervised 285 women making men's suits. I was making \$22,500 a year when I left.

I was having marital problems. I got a divorce.

I've been doing migrant work for a year and a half and I'm sick of it. I was with Westinghouse for 21-and-a-half years. Then I went into the home improvement business with my son. We were making pretty good money until 1974, when the bottom dropped out of everything for us.

Then I started having problems with my wife. Then my son got killed. His best friend shot him but he got away with it — they ruled it an accident.

That topped it all off. I just got to the point where I didn't give a damn.

I went down to Florida, and since then I've been fooling around with farm work and labor pools.

The older you get, the harder this life gets for you. It's a rough tough life. I don't like it a bit. But it's the next best thing to no job at all. It's easy to get a job like this because most people don't want to do it.

For conditions to improve, the workers are going to have to be unionized. But it's going to need a little more intelligence on the part of the people who are doing the farm work. Most of the people who I run into who do this work are alcoholics or are sub-normal, mentally ill, or they're not educated.

In this state [North Carolina] you're up against a very, very tough battle. I understand you got right-to-work laws and all this stuff. It's going to have to start up North — unionizing — like in Ohio or Michigan, and move down.

And you've got to have money. Somebody's going to have to put up some money so people have a place to meet. You can't just walk around the orange groves, or the sugar fields, or the sweet potato fields. If you tried that, you'd get your head beat in.

You'd have to rent a small building in a town. You'd have to have a central location. You'd have to put out a lot of leaflets. You'd have to get to know the workers. You may start out with only 10 people and hope that it grows.

If you take Minute Maid Orange Juice, and you see the fancy cans and you pay the price for them — if people only knew what was behind that: the slave labor, the bad conditions, the poor wages.

It's a shame that these big companies — and they're the ones behind these big farms — that they get away with this and people don't know anything about it. It's the companies that hire these contractors who in turn get these guys all boozed up and take all their money away from them and keep them paralyzed until they get to the I-don't-care point.

As far as I'm concerned this is just a damn lousy way to live. You're *not* living when you do this, you're barely existing. For me, I've got to find a change. And I'm hoping it's in a bigger city, rather than going back to farm work.

—interviews by Alma Blount



Sugar Cane Slavery

Florida has 300,000 acres of sugar cane fields, with an annual harvest valued at \$350 million. For over 30 years, that cane has been cut by legions of Jamaican and other West Indian workers because the sugar corporations — such as United States Sugar and Gulf & Western — find this

labor force "fast, cheap and legal."

Fred Sikes, a vice president of the United States Sugar Corporation in Clewiston, Florida, says that American workers "are just not willing to cut the cane. There is a sociological stigma." A colleague of Sikes at the Gulf & Western operation 10 miles down the road in South Bay is more blunt: "I am saying that no American will cut cane anywhere in the U.S. at any price."

It is true that Americans do not currently cut cane in Florida. However, until World War II they cut all of Florida's cane. Marshall Barry, a Tampa economist and former professor of economics at New College in Sarasota, Florida, asks: "What has America done in 100 years to an extremely productive labor force? All of a sudden they are unable to wield a machete? Is there some kind of genetic change that makes their arms cramp when they pick up a handle? Or is it that conditions are so rotten?"

Barry and many others believe that the sugar corporations "want a captive labor force, an exploitable one that they have power over. They don't have power over Americans. But they do over the Jamaicans."

Before doing any work, each Jamaican cane cutter signs a contract with the sugar corporations relinquishing nearly all civil and human rights. The Jamaican Council of Churches has reported that the cane cutters in Florida are treated like slaves. So have legal services attorneys; so have newspaper reporters; so have research scholars and so have the Jamaicans themselves. As far back as 1951, the President's (Truman) Commission on Migratory Labor focused on the lack of "official vigilance for the protection of living and working standards of alien farm laborers."

But in 1980, the federal government, acting through the Department of Labor and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), apparently condones these conditions; in fact, these agencies participate in the perpetuation of the "captive labor" system. Also, for the first time this year, the federal government is recruiting Haitian refugees to work in the cane, under the same contract as the Jamaicans.

The INS stipulates that each Jamaican laborer can work for just one employer, at one location, for a specified time, at a predetermined



wage. The workers cannot negotiate for themselves nor are there any substantive grievance procedures. The Jamaicans are housed in enormous barracks, miles from any of the small agricultural towns in the area, surrounded by barbed wire fences and the Everglades' treacherous channels.

Even though their wage is ostensibly set by the federal government, Jamaican cane cutters are paid whatever they can get. They work at the whim of the bossman, who takes his orders from the corporations. No visitors — not even relatives — can enter the "labor camps," as they are called, and the workers can leave only with an authorization. Lawyers are routinely refused entry to the camps to see their clients, and American pastors are denied access to minister to members of their faiths.

The cane cutters accept all these conditions because, as one man said, "We are Jamaicans working in the U.S." When a Jamaican doesn't abide by one of the rules, he is "cashiered," deported. As one cane cutter explained with deep bitterness, "It is better to be exploited than to lose the opportunity to come back next year."

Due largely to an austerity program imposed by the International Monetary Fund and a U.S. effort in the mid-'70s to destabilize the left-wing government of Michael Manley, it is almost impossible to get work in Jamaica these days. Increasingly, State Department officials worried about Prime Minister Manley's friendship with his island neighbor, Cuba, and pressure from the United States threatens to wreck the Jamaican economy. The jobless rate stands at 30 percent; foreign capital is lacking, development virtually non-existent. The minimum wage, in places where there is one, is less than 60 cents an hour. In October, 1980, Edward Seaga, running on a conservative, capitalist platform, defeated Manley in national elections.

To come to America, applicants are screened by the Jamaican government and by representatives of the sugar companies. The list of workers who "want in" to the U.S. is always inexhaustible. In Florida, a cane cutter is theoretically guaranteed at least \$3.79 an hour.

One cane cutter whose home is in St. Elizabeth's parish in southwest Jamaica, lives with eight members of

his family in one room. He has become demoralized by the recent downturn in Jamaica's economy. Interviewed before the recent election, he said, "There is no work here. Everything has collapsed. The government doesn't care about the small man. You see, if the man knows you are a 'Labor' [meaning you belong to the Jamaican Labor Party] then you are out of work. His only way out of this is to go to the U.S.A. for work." But while the government has changed hands, the necessity of belonging to the ruling party will remain the same. Two decades of intermittent rule by both parties has shown this.

Fitzroy Small, a Kingston resident, has cut cane in Florida for several years; his wife and children depend entirely on that income. "These jobs are so important that in the winter of 1978 [during the riots in two Kingston slums over sharply rising prices and unemployment] members of one political party were killing those of the other to get a 'ticket.'"

The ticket, also called the "card," is a piece of paper issued by the Jamaican government entitling the bearer to enter the enormous pool of applicants for one of the U.S. cane jobs. A man chosen to work in the U.S. has the potential to earn several thousand dollars in a half-year — if all goes right — compared to Jamaica's per capita income of \$981 a year.

Each spring the tickets are distributed by the government to party officials. Probyn Aitken, Jamaica's minister of labor in the Manley government, who describes the procedure as fair, says there is a "scarce benefit" in belonging to the ruling party. At the same time, he explained that each member of Parliament in the ruling party receives 10 tickets for every one that opposition members are allowed.

In many interviews, Jamaican cane cutters repeatedly told of having to bribe PNP officials with cash, imported liquors or promises of a percentage of their future U.S. earnings. Of 90 Jamaicans interviewed during Manley's stewardship who had participated in the program, three-quarters claimed to be PNP members.

The Jamaicans who do wind up with tickets are then called to the Kingston and regional labor ministries for "selection." From the mountains, the coastal plains and particularly from the capital, thousands and thousands of men converge on the

ministry offices.

Often it will take all day to proceed the length of the line. But once inside and in front of the long tables where the American growers sit, things move more quickly; the scenario is all too familiar. "Have you ever cut cane before?" the Americans ask. Time and again, the Jamaicans answer, "Yes sir!" regardless of their work experience.

A tailor from the coastal town of Black River said, "I never did cut the cane before, but you have to tell them yes to get the job." He got it. Cyril McPherson, who grew up in Kingston, explained, "I never cut cane, but I told them some lies." He got a job. Another Kingston man added, "When the white man puts his thumb on your hand and asks what kind of work you do, of course you say farmwork even if you never worked in a field before." He was also hired.

Finally, three to six months after having been screened, one out of three men receives a telegram informing him that he will be going to the United States the next day.

Late at night, the men pour into Kingston to be given last-minute injections of penicillin "for any disease they might have picked up," explains Les Dean, an official at the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association [FFVA]. They are then flown to Miami or West Palm Beach via the cheap night charter flights.

At the U.S. airport, the Jamaicans are met by FFVA and Jamaican government representatives. The work contract is explained, as are the rules of deportation. Just before dawn the weary Jamaicans are loaded into buses for the two-hour trip to the sugar camps.

Men arriving at Moorehaven, Belle Glade and South Bay said they felt "terrified because everyone is separated." One man added, "I was so alone. I didn't know where any of my friends went."

After arriving at the camps, the Jamaicans will be asked to work every day except for Christmas and New Year's. The cane harvest runs from November until mid-April. Frequently, they will be kept cutting for 12 hours at a time, even if they should start throwing up or just saying they're tired. There is no time off for the drenching rains or the winter freezes.

Cane cutting is among the most strenuous and dangerous types of



work still performed by hand. The humidity and the soot is thick, the cane stalks unyielding, the long machete a potential weapon and the pace — astounding.

When a man cuts cane, there are three sounds he remembers. One of them is a heave, a heave from the toes and from the thighs and from the stomach and the shoulders and even inside the head. It comes enormously — and all at once — as the steel blade tears through the stalk, splintering the fibers and spilling the juices.

Then immediately, there is another sound. A breath. A sigh.

And then the third, an order. “Tighten up!”

Fitzroy Small explained that in the fields he had to cut and stack a certain amount of cane each hour or risk being sent home. “They had a bicycle gauge,” he said. “If you don’t make the mark, they pull you out of the field and put you into the bus.”

Other Jamaicans told of how the companies altered their pay records to make it look like they were meeting federal wage requirements. Several alleged that the price of a row of cane would vary from man to man and from day to day based solely on the field supervisor’s discretion.

These allegations are hardly new to the U.S. government or to most workers in Belle Glade. In the mid-1970s, the federal government prosecuted the major Florida sugar corporations for altering pay records, purposely under-cutting hours, arbitrarily setting wages, and willfully violating transportation safety statutes. Several years after the U.S. Congress passed a bill requiring farmworkers to be transported in buses, two Gulf & Western tractor-trailers carrying over 100 Jamaican cane cutters and their machetes overturned near South Bay. The result: one dead, 86 seriously injured. The fine: \$1,000.

While some of these illegalities have been resolved, the basic inequities and abuses continue, says Kathy Grannis, a Florida Rural Legal Services attorney who has represented the cane cutters. Repeatedly, Jamaicans said that if a worker makes a simple complaint or asks a question about anything from the condition of the toilet facilities to the deductions listed on his paycheck, he would be summarily fired and deported.

Stanley Myers has been coming to the United States for three decades

under Department of Labor programs. He has worked in mattress factories, cherry and apple orchards, celery fields and the cane. He said the American growers “trick you all the time. They don’t want us to know anything. You are just supposed to work. We have no rights.”

Another cane cutter with eight children said, “They think Jamaicans are so bad off that they will do anything. I feel like a slave cutting cane. The Americans look at us like we’re not human beings.”

It is rare — almost unheard of — when a group of Jamaicans protest their dismissal. However, in January, 1979, 19 Jamaicans told Les Dean of FFVA that they wouldn’t leave without their back pay. Dean said that he explained to them that their money would be forwarded to Jamaica. The workers insisted that they have the cash. Without it, they said, they could not afford the ride from the Kingston airport. Dean simply left.

The group of Jamaicans immediately sought assistance from the police, who referred them to Florida Rural Legal Services. FRLS attorneys negotiated a small cash settlement, and a statement was signed by the FFVA guaranteeing that these men would not be barred from the selection process the following year.

The 19 men explained that this was the first time in their lives that they had stood up for their rights. They were pleased with the outcome, given the circumstances. In Jamaica four months after their deportation, however, they exhibited an odd mixture of pride and anguish. They were still proud, because as one of them said, “A right is a right. You have to stick up for your rights.”

At the same time, they said that they were worried about the possibility of being blacklisted, despite the agreement. One of the more experienced cutters said with an uneasy anger: “I am afraid that next year I will go into the selection and one of the cane men will say, ‘Oh, you are one of them. Sorry, come back next year.’”

None of the 19, in fact, even made it into the selection process for the 1980 season. Neither did any of them receive a ticket. No bribe could achieve a ticket, the 19 reported.

In Kingston, then-Labor Minister Aitken discussed the incident and other similar ones. He said, “These

men don’t have to go. They’re not being invited. If they think they are being exploited they should stay at home.” Talking about the sugar growers, he added, “The chap who has cane ripening wants to get it to market when it’s ready, not a month later. The growers have a schedule; it’s a business.”

Many agricultural economists say that the use of Jamaican workers is only temporary, citing the histories of other immigrant groups that have arrived in the U.S., first to be exploited and later to be replaced by hungrier, more desperate nationalities. Even Secretary of Labor F. Ray Marshall said that whenever one group of workers gets its feet solidly on the ground and begins to improve its condition and bargaining position, the growers will turn to others who are more easily controlled.

Anthony Szczygiel, a New York attorney who works with migrant farmworkers, agrees that the Jamaicans are being exploited; but he says, “American growers will only stop using Jamaicans when they [the workers] get sophisticated enough to demand their rights.”

There is a flaw in these arguments, however. Jamaicans are not like other immigrant groups. For over three decades, they have been flown in and out of the U.S. with no gain in rights or claim to citizenship. However, Jamaica’s economy is at its worst point since independence from Great Britain in 1962.

Last winter I received the following letter from a Kingston cane cutter who had been fired and deported and, he says, blacklisted by the sugar growers. “I just can’t take this suffering anymore. It is so bad that I can’t explain it to you because there is no work out here. Most of the time, me and my family have to go to bed without anything to eat. My son is here and I can’t find a cent to send him to school. I don’t know where to go for a job. Some of the time I have to sit down and cry. Believe me, I would not tell you no lie. Why I has to cry is to know that I just have to stay at home. I’m not sick. I don’t have a homefoot.” □

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Port Arthur, Texas, is a community of 50,000 people located on Lake Sabine, 10 miles from the Gulf of Mexico and 90 miles southeast of Houston. Generations of Port Arthur residents have worked in the only significant industry in the area: the petrochemical refineries, which form a horseshoe around the community. During the day, clouds of black smoke and acrid fumes hang over the city; at night the flames from the towers that burn off waste gas light up the sky and can be seen for miles.

PORT ARTHUR, TEXAS

BURNING GAS

BY KEVIN SIDEL

The old downtown of Port Arthur, Texas, stretches for five blocks north and one mile east-west along a broad street near Lake Sabine. The main street was once decorated with impressive Spanish-styled buildings adorned with brilliant tiles. The coffee shop and telegraph office of the crumbling central hotel still provide refuge from the Texas sun, and the Trailways bus station and baggage depot remain in their original location across the street.

On the rest of this once-busy street the buildings stand empty amid increasing numbers of rubble-strewn lots. The real center of Port Arthur has literally moved 10 blocks north — not to a new array of hotels and businesses, but to a six-lane highway, the Gulfway. The Gulfway runs through the new center of Port Arthur, past restaurants, movie theatres, gas stations, shopping centers; it leads, eventually, to the Gulf and Texaco refineries, and from there to the Gulf of Mexico and down to Galveston.

The teenagers of Port Arthur come to the Gulfway every evening to speed in their fast cars. This evening ritual of horizontal mobility in many ways symbolizes the ironies and frustrations of life in this refinery city, where upward mobility is nil. Late at night during the midnight-to-seven “graveyard” shift at the refineries, the Trans-Ams and the Corvettes and the Camaros line up at Burger King, down on the other side of Twin City Highway. The young drivers rev up their motors and dry their hands on their jeans in anticipation of speed. The cars burst forth onto Gulfway Drive in first gear, pass the lights at Twin City Highway, and jump into second gear as they zoom by the closed Texaco station. Third gear means they are rapidly approaching Pizza Inn, a favorite spot for beer drinking and hustling the opposite sex. If the parking lots look empty, the low-slung, road-hugging, custom-painted, factory-ordered-option-laden cars hit fourth gear at Dunkin Donuts. After that, there is nothing left to hold back

the cowboys of the asphalt, and they gun their horsepower loud and whip their gearshifts hard and fill the summer streets with their dust, their smell and their residue.

Port Arthur has 50,000 residents, most of whom are descendants of men who left the fields of Louisiana to work in the oil fields of Texas. For many Texas families the big oil discoveries during the early years of the twentieth century were the keys to the American Dream; the oil industry provided steady hours and steady pay — a decent living, financial security and money for consumer goods.

For many white families 50 years ago, the new industry also brought an unusual degree of upward mobility. Since those days the lines of class and social status have frozen. Parents and children in Port Arthur today can make few choices, either economic or social. The only steady work in the area is still in the petrochemical industry. And the refineries are where most of the young Gulfway hotrodders will end up, too, after their high



Mural along old commercial street.

The Port Arthur refinery of Texaco, Inc., said to be the third largest in the world and the largest in the United States, covers 16 square miles and employs approximately 5,400 workers. (Texaco will not reveal the precise number.) The refinery produces hundreds of different types of greases, oils and other petrochemicals; it is one of the few refineries in the United States that has the capability of packaging and shipping its own products.

school rubber-burning days and a year or two of sitting around Port Arthur, filled with futile dreams and unspecified frustrations. For them, the highway seems the closest approximation to freedom.

Exacerbating the lack of social and vocational choices in Port Arthur is the fact that the jobs in the oil refineries are dangerous, frustrating and confining. An explosion on March 17, 1977, demonstrated to Port Arthur's workers the grim reality of the perils and indignities forced on them at their workplace.

As dawn broke on that St. Patrick's Day, black workers from the blighted downtown area joined their white suburban co-workers at the gate of the Texaco refinery, the largest single employer in the city with 5,400 employees. Some drove alone to work, others arrived with co-workers. Wayne Dennis was driven to work by his wife. She kissed him goodbye at 6:10 a.m., and watched as he and the others

walked through the plant gates to another day's work. Barely two hours later, Wayne Dennis left the Port Arthur refinery in an ambulance. His body, like those of 19 other men, was burned almost beyond recognition. Eight of the men died; the other 12 are scarred and crippled for life.

The 20 men had been assigned to repair a unit, and while they were setting up for the day's work, a gas line on a unit next to theirs gave way, spewing butane gas in a 300-foot-wide cloud. The workers were caught in the cloud of gas. The cloud ignited.

The 12 "lucky" men who survived are still going through the long and horribly painful recovery process that follows severe burns. They, their families, the families of the men who died, and the city of Port Arthur will never be the same.

Occupational safety and health has been an issue in Port Arthur for as long as there have been refineries and chemical companies. Only in the last 10 years, however, has an organized and effective fight been waged for

better conditions in the workplaces there.

At the center of this fight has been the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW), a 180,000-member organization that represents workers in refineries, chemical companies and atomic energy-related industries throughout the United States. The Port Arthur local, 4-23, is the largest in OCAW, with some 6,000 members.

At the local level, much of the impetus behind the drive for better occupational health and safety has come from Larry Stefflen. Stefflen has worked for 20 years in the Texaco garage, and sometimes serves as chairman of the Texaco Group Workers Committee of Local 4-23. Local elections are held every year, and individual events or incidents are extremely important in the voting. In recent years, elections in the local have swung on victories or setbacks in the local's efforts towards better safety and health regulations.

The first real hope for better working conditions at the Texaco plant was



View of the Texaco refinery on the day of the explosion.

We heard a pipe, seen a lot of white stuff coming out, and we thought it was a steam line blew, that happens once in a while. So the guy with me started taking off running, and I grabbed hold of him, and told him, "Don't run till you find out what's going on."

I told him to just get up against the column, see, he hadn't been out there more than two years, and I had been out there eight, so we stood there for a minute and smelled, and I didn't smell anything, so I knew it wasn't steam. So I told him, I said, "That's not a steam line, that's propane, so we better get out of here."

born in 1970, with the signing of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). The past 10 years have brought many improvements, but they've come slowly and only after relentless effort.

"In those early years, and up to 1977," remembers Larry Stefflen, "our contact and work with OSHA was limited to inspections based on imminent danger complaints. We would see a door falling off a truck, or see an open gas line, or some other life-threatening situation, and call OSHA in. They would do an inspection, give the company a small citation and fine, and then leave. It amounted to OSHA slapping the company on the hand.

"When OSHA wouldn't do much, and when we were just getting to learn how to use the system, some of the workers were getting discouraged. They would never see any real results. Some of the workers began questioning whether it was worth going through the hassle of going out on a limb to make a complaint if the results

were not going to be worthwhile."

A number of things came together in 1977, according to Stefflen, that changed occupational safety and health in Port Arthur. "Our local, in 1976 and 1977, began spending some money to back up our complaints. With the OSHA complaints, a local has to send witnesses, testimony; a local really has to want to follow up on a complaint to get some action. We started to do that in 1977.

"Then, in March of 1977, we had the explosion on the stabilizers. This had two effects on our work. First, it was a terrible example of the dangers in our workplace. But second, it was an event for the local members to rally around."

In Port Arthur, only a limited number of people, even in the union, had seen occupational safety and health as a major issue. The St. Patrick's Day explosion "was definitely the turning point for us," says Stefflen. "We had been dealing with occupational safety and health as an issue, not as a real thing that was happening

day-to-day. But when the men were caught in that cloud, and when the men died, occupational safety and health became vital. We had meetings at the hall, and where 50 people might have come before, we had hundreds. Sometimes it really does take a tragedy to get the workers aware of the dangers. It's terrible that men had to die before health and safety became such a big issue."

In other places, a worker may choose to switch jobs in order to escape the working conditions. Not in Port Arthur. Because the refinery and chemical industry jobs are the only positions that offer the steady work and wages needed to raise and feed a family, workers are trapped in their jobs. The explosion at the Texaco refinery made many workers in Port Arthur feel that no one was protecting them and their lives.

OSHA, the federal agency with responsibility for enforcing adherence to safety and health standards, is severely underfunded — its budget is less than three cents per worker —



Two graves of men who died in the explosion.

It was his second fire. He was in the hospital, and I talked to him the night he was there. He died the next morning at 6:00. He couldn't talk, he couldn't see. I said to him, I said, "We're here, some of the kids." I told him, "You're gonna be all right, you made it through the first one." He squeezed my hand, and we prayed for him. He was the first to die.

so that spending for prevention of occupational illness and injury is less than two percent of the cost of workers' compensation payments alone.

A bill currently in Congress would further reduce the ability of OSHA to do its job. The proposed bill, sponsored by Senator Richard Schweiker (Rep., Pennsylvania) would, in brief, eliminate random safety inspections in 90 percent of workplaces and severely limit the scope of inspections; it would also cripple the complaint process when workers attempt to receive prompt safety inspections.

OSHA's director, Eula Bingham, has stated that, "Under this proposal, OSHA's presence would generally be permitted only after injury or death had occurred."

A study by the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union shows that a large proportion of U.S. oil refineries would be exempt from random safety inspections if the Schweiker OSHA bill is enacted. A severe reduction in the power of OSHA will only increase the body count.

To many workers in Port Arthur, a further erosion of OSHA would eliminate the skimpy protection they've won in their workplaces. Many are already resigned to a life of work in dangerous conditions; they feel helpless and sometimes even attempt to block the situation out of their minds.

Linda Frazier, a security guard at the Texaco plant who has served as a social worker for the Workers Assistance Program (a Texas labor-sponsored organization in the Port Arthur area), claims that workers have become "selectively blind" to conditions in the Port Arthur refineries and chemical companies. "With limited ability to change the conditions, the workers, in many cases, have chosen not to see some of the conditions. It's the only way to go back to work every day.

"After the explosion, attendance soared at the union meetings, but that dwindled down after a little while," says Frazier. "You see the effects in various ways. At our program we have seen constant increases in emotional trouble, alcohol, drug abuse, marital

and family problems in the past three years. And both the workers and our program believe that some of this can be traced to the changes in the Texaco workplace since the 1977 explosion."

Stefflen, Frazier and other union members and officials claim that Texaco has gone out of its way to harass workers since the 1977 explosion. They say the company concentrates on picky details in the safety rules, while ignoring the important issues. Says Stefflen, "Workers are supposed to wear protective glasses when they are near a machine that is running. Texaco now cites workers for a violation if they are in the shop, with no machines on, without glasses on. They told a man that even when he is taking a nap during a break he better wear his glasses."

Stefflen says the company has also spotlighted a safety rule about beards, hoping to turn workers against OSHA and its regulations. "In order to have a proper fit of the respirator, you have to have a certain limit to facial hair. The Texaco people have used the



He's lost so much of his strength. I used to rely on him for little things like opening jars; I can't even rely on him for that cause his hands can't get a hold. He was very independent, and all of a sudden he was placed in a situation where he had no control. He had to depend on everyone else. You can't feed yourself, when you go to the bathroom you can't do anything for yourself there. You learn to be dependent, you learn to say, "Thank you."



You can't go outside cause the sun's shining, that's the only reason. You can't go walking, you can't do anything that you wanted to do because the sun was shining and you get the blisters. You're locked into a cage, it's like a caged animal, you just get to where you can't cope with anything anymore. I've got nerve damage in my legs, both legs. I've got nerve damage in my right arm and hand. I've got nerve damage in my left arm. Now what the hell am I supposed to do to make a living? They couldn't leave me alone, cause if I fell down, I wouldn't be able to get back up. So if my wife had to go out, one of my daughters was sitting right there. That's a lot of responsibility to put on a kid.

beard standards to send men home, and the decisions about the beards have been left up to individual supervisors, rather than one standard. While everyone in the refinery is supposed to be available for fire-fighting, the office people are allowed to wear beards, and the workers in the plant can't."

Regulating a man's right to grow a beard is a touchy issue for these Texans, and there are other complaints that workers inside the plant are treated as second-class citizens. One story told frequently after the explosion: "A man who works in the office, in the front, had cancer. It was totally unrelated to working at Texaco. But the company, when he came back to work in a wheelchair, built him a special parking space, a ramp for his wheelchair and gave him easier work at the same pay."

"They kill eight workers and injure a dozen others with 30-year-old pipe," one worker commented. "And what do the 20-year workers and widows get? A year at quarter pay. And then

they get cut off."

Other workers believe that Texaco's double standards are designed to make the plant workers feel that they are merely hired hands — hands which can be replaced. They see this as another company tactic to frighten the workers and force them to back down from their support of OSHA standards. Texaco's harassment of rank-and-file workers sharply affects the local union leadership, too. If workers are unhappy with the extent of health and safety harassment in the plant, they can vote out of office those union leaders who call for health and safety regulations and enforcement. Anger over petty rules harassment, along with the fear they might lose their jobs, can turn workers against aggressive union leadership.

"Texaco has started reducing the number of jobs or positions as a way of eliminating health and safety violations," says Larry Stefflen. "For example, instead of cleaning up the paint shop to prevent workers from overexposure to fumes, Texaco has

just reduced the number of painting positions. In the garage, where OSHA found a lift unsafe, Texaco eliminated the lift, subcontracted the job out of the plant, and they eliminated one worker. The workers blame the union for some of the jobs that we lost, they say we are pushing too hard for health and safety and we're losing jobs. That doesn't help you in a yearly local election."

In Port Arthur, health and safety has developed into more than an issue between workers and management. The economy of the city, the union leadership, the priorities of the workers and even the courts are involved. Widows of the men who were killed and some of the survivors of the St. Patrick's Day explosion have filed suit against Texaco and some contractors in order to recover damages from the explosion. The widow of a man who, in a later accident, suffocated in a closed oxygen vessel has also sued. It is not easy, in a one-industry town, to sue a major



I can't stand direct sunlight, I usually wait until early evening to go out. I used to enjoy sports, but my activity is kind of limited now. If I play basketball I have to be careful no one scratches me. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night for no reason, with nightmares and all.



I think that if the kids hadn't accepted me that it would have been a lot harder. I got good kids. I know one guy's kids wouldn't have anything to do with him. I guess if my kids hadn't come up to me like they did, I would have died. Cause my kids and my wife are my whole life. If I can provide for them, I don't need nothing. I walked in the door of the apartment, not one of them faltered a step, including the baby. But the kids didn't depend on me, and that's what hurt. I had to depend on them. One of my kids falls asleep on the floor, I can't pick them up, that's the kind of stuff that hurts.

employer. But a sense of community exists in Port Arthur that has enabled some workers to sue the company that their neighbors depend upon. This sense of community sometimes surfaces very dramatically.

"When those men died," said one wife of a Texaco worker, "we all felt it. It could have been anyone's son, or father or brother. It was as if everyone's relatives had died in the blast."

The mother of a 24-year-old man who died spoke of his friends and co-workers. "The people who called and came by made us realize how many friends we had and what they meant. All those men who had to go back in to the plant the next days, now I worry about them. If the death of my son can in some way keep it from happening to others, then all this will have come to some good."

There may never be another butane gas leak and explosion at the Port Arthur refinery. But there are plenty of other hazards. At a recent hearing before the Occupational Safety and

Health Administration Review Commission, OCAW charged that Texaco had not provided proper working conditions and equipment for men who were handling benzene, a known carcinogen, in the dock area at the Port Arthur plant. Sworn statements by workers allege that Texaco did not provide sufficient numbers of respirators on the docks, and did not train the workers to use them properly. One worker was assigned to peer into open vats of benzene on barges to determine when the vat was filled. A co-worker recalls, "He said he was dizzy, which I could tell by his appearance. He first stuck his head over the tank and he began to get a strong smell and get dizzy. Therefore he said he would just hold his breath and make out the best he could."

Another man claimed that Texaco had never informed him that benzene causes cancer. (This claim was repeated by many other workers.) Said the worker, "I think the Texas company [Texaco] was wrong, very wrong, in not informing an employee that it was

changing his white or red corpuscles. Had they told us, possibly we could have got something done about it. Maybe it is too late, who knows? But we are going to get some medical help some way or another. That is all I have got to say."

Another worker recalled, "They said we might want to put the mask (respirator) on. But I didn't think it was important to wear the thing, nobody else had any on."

When questioned about instruction manuals for the few respirators that were provided, one man replied that he "might have read it, depending on how long it was and how big printing they use."

The OSHA Review Commission ruled in July, 1980, that the Texaco operating procedures with benzene were faulty, and that the conditions needed some correction. But, said one of the two ruling members of the commission, the violations were not serious, and the cost of changing the workplace conditions so that the men would be protected from the carcin-



Main Street with flame of refinery in background.

My boy looks just like him. Seeing him is just like seeing my husband all over again. They have the same personality and the same actions. I think it made it easier, that I was carrying the baby. I had some part of him with me. I knew it would be a boy. I worry what will happen when he goes to school, with no father image. There is so much that the kids learn from their fathers. It's hard for me to know what parts he's missing.

I have dreams, like he's coming back, or what would have happened if he had lived through the accident. He was a vain man, proud of himself. I don't know how he could have coped with the scars. I couldn't consider remarrying for a long time. Now I realize that both of us need someone; he needs the father. You can't help but ask, "God, why did it happen to us?"

ogen would cost more than one million dollars. This commissioner ruled that the amount of overexposure did not warrant forcing Texaco to spend the money to protect its workers.

According to the published record of the commission, "While affirming the citations (exposure to benzene) Judge Blythe refused to order the installation of proposed engineering controls for containing the benzene vapors. The judge found that the Secretary [of OSHA] had established the technological, but not the economic, feasibility of the proposed controls." In other words, protecting workers from a carcinogen is not cost-effective.

The United States Supreme Court ruled on July 2, 1980, against strengthening the standard for exposure to benzene. The OSHA Review Commission ruled against making Texaco pay to ensure a safe workplace, free from carcinogens. Senator Schweiker's amendments, as of this date, are still being brought up in the U.S. Senate. The answer to the question "Who

will protect the workers?" is still unanswered.

Workers in Port Arthur can only hope that the question will be answered soon. Those who peer into open vats of benzene, who handle benzene in their bare hands, who have no idea of what a respirator is or how it is to be worn, must continue to work under these conditions. Workers who have breathed benzene for 20 years must now wait to see the results: will they develop leukemia or other forms of cancer?

There is, however, some reason to believe that if these workers are not better protected than their colleagues of three years ago, at least they are better informed. Larry Stefflen says that during the past three years "good strides have been made in safety and health. With the assistance of Anthony Mazzocchi [former vice president of OCAW and now its Health and Safety Director] and others in the union, we have had the backup that we needed.

"In the past three years, workers

have begun to know their rights and use them. Following the explosion, some workers have refused to do jobs they felt were dangerous."

The future for workers at the Texaco plant — and for Port Arthur residents in general — is fraught with both hope and danger. Will the company succeed in frightening its workers away from their demands for better health and safety provisions? Or will the workers, individually and collectively, exert their right to a safe and humane workplace? □

Kevin Sidel worked as an intern with the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union during the summer of 1979. The photographs here are also by Sidel except those on pages 77, 79 and 81-right, which are courtesy of the Port Arthur Times.

NOTE: The quotes with some of these photos are not necessarily from the people pictured; they are excerpts from confidential interviews conducted by Sidel.

ALONG FOR THE RIDE

BY DEBBIE GALANT

When Connie didn't come home at five o'clock like she said she would, Mrs. Kyles started worrying. Somehow, she didn't trust that boy Connie was with, the one who said he was tired of people running over him when she and Mr. Kyles refused to let him spend the night earlier in the week. Connie had seemed less than comfortable lately about talking to her boyfriend Jackie on the phone, or going with him to see his father in the hospital.

"I get these — I don't know if you call them vibes or not — when something's going on with my kids," said Mrs. Kyles, who waited out much of that night alone since her husband works second shift for R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. As the night wore on, Mrs. Kyles got more and more worried, finally calling the sheriff's department. Jackie had been in trouble with the law before and had served some prison time.

"I don't remember what time it was but I finally called the sheriff's department and I told them how worried I was about my daughter. But they told me she would have to be gone 24 hours before I could report her missing," Mrs. Kyles said. "I was for some reason in fear of her life."

Connie did come home the next day, after her father spotted Jackie's car on the road and told him to bring Connie home right away. But she wasn't there long. Later that day she was booked for first-degree murder.

Connie Lynn Kyles, now 20, is currently in her third year of a 40- to 50-year sentence for second-degree murder.

About nine p.m. on the night of June 23, 1977, while Mrs. Kyles was worrying, Connie and Jackie Ray Brewer were pulling up to the house of Agnes

Crater, a 53-year-old widow whose previous testimony had sent Jackie to prison. Connie wasn't aware that Jackie knew Mrs. Crater or that he planned to kill her for sending him off to jail. She just knew they were going to rob her.

Mrs. Crater, who lived alone, let the two in and for a while Jackie and Mrs. Crater talked about how mean people are. Suddenly Jackie turned to Connie and asked her to hit the woman. Connie refused. Then he told Connie to turn off the lights, which she did.

The next wild moments while Jackie beat Mrs. Crater and then slashed her throat, Connie ran back and forth to the door, wanting to run for help but afraid to. When they left in the darkness, Connie knew that Mrs. Crater had been hurt but not that she'd been killed.

It wasn't until they had driven to Virginia that Connie found out what happened. Jackie kept saying, "We're just like Bonnie and Clyde," until Connie finally asked why. Jackie then threw his knife up on the dashboard to show Connie the blood on it and told her he'd cut the woman's throat.

Connie made him stop the car so she could throw up.

Although Jackie Brewer's confession accused Connie of having held down Mrs. Crater's legs while he cut her throat, Connie maintains she never participated in the murder. Polygraph tests and the testimony of the investigating officer, Charles Reavis, back her up. Reavis also testified that Connie was afraid of Brewer — the reason, she and her parents say, that she didn't run for help. According to Connie, Jackie became madly possessive after they had sex, and when she wanted to break up, he threatened to hit her face so no one would ever look at her and

to kill her family.

"He was always talking about he wanted to cut someone's throat," Mr. Kyles said later. "It could have been Connie."

Even though Connie didn't participate in the murder, under North Carolina law Connie was as guilty as Jackie because she knew they were going to rob the woman. Under the state's felony-murder rule, a participant in a robbery where a murder takes place is guilty of murder even if he or she didn't physically participate in it.

Under her lawyer's advice, Connie entered a guilty plea to second-degree murder in order to avoid a first-degree murder trial which might have sent her to the gas chamber. Although she pled guilty, her plea was entered with a stipulation — agreed to by the prosecution — that Connie was not aware that Jackie was going to kill Agnes Crater and that she didn't know Mrs. Crater had in fact been killed until after she left the house.

With this stipulation, her lawyer felt, Connie would probably get a probationary sentence or a very light active sentence. But to further convince the court of her innocence, her lawyer had her sent to N.C. Correctional Center for Women, where a group of psychologists would examine her for two months and recommend a sentence.

The committee reported back that Connie's involvement in the crime was due to emotional deficiencies that made her "vulnerable to negative peer influence." Her parents had separated several times during her childhood because of drinking and marital infidelity, creating a "chaotic home life," the psychologists said. Connie was also greatly overweight and had a bad self-image, which led her to resort to alcohol and drugs in her early teens,



photo by Debbie Galant

While she was in high school, her parents turned around and became more religious, exerting a new brand of discipline which made Connie rebellious. The psychologists pinned her emotional age at about 10.

"Connie's immaturity, her intense need for acceptance, and her lack of judgment are seen as significant factors related to her involvement in the current offense," the committee reported. "From all indications it appears that she was willing to engage in robbery but that she had no knowledge of her co-defendant's apparent

intentions to kill the victim because of a grudge. . . .

"The committee did not see Connie as an assaultive or aggressive person, nor was she seen as being imminently dangerous or significantly anti-social or as having true criminal tendencies. However, the need for acceptance and the ease with which she is influenced to gain acceptance and approval made her vulnerable to negative peer influence."

The committee did not see imprisonment as necessary to protect society from Connie: she was neither

assaultive nor aggressive. It also noted that the 11 months she'd already spent in jail was probably enough to keep her out of trouble in the future, and that sending her to prison would surround her with bad influences: what got her into trouble in the first place.

The psychologists were split as exactly what to do with Connie. Two of the four committee members recommended that she be given a sentence of less than 10 years as a Committed Youthful Offender and that a firm contract be worked out requiring her to pass a high school equivalency test and set psychological and vocational counseling. Completion of the three requirements would entitle her to conditional release.

The other half of the committee felt that the 11 months Connie had already spent in jail was enough. They recommended probation.

On June 1, 1978, Connie went before Superior Court Judge Julius A. Rousseau for sentencing. In light of the psychologists' report, Connie, her parents and her lawyer were hopeful that she would get a light or non-active sentence.

Then Judge Rousseau announced his 40- to 50-year sentence on Connie. She was said to have left the courtroom screaming, "Where's Jesus? Where's Jesus?"

"The trial, the whole thing, he [Judge Rousseau] would sit there like this," Connie said, resting her chin in her palm and closing her eyes. "He was not listening. He had his mind made up."

Judge Rousseau, asked later why his sentence was so much longer than the psychologists had recommended, replied, "They don't ever recommend anybody to go to prison." He added that although he couldn't remember the details of the case, he recalled

evidence that Connie did participate in the murder.

"I felt that she was there and I can't remember all the details about it," Rousseau said. "And you know, murder's murder. It's a human life that's been taken."

Connie Lynn Kyles will be eligible for parole in seven years, after having completed one-fourth of her sentence. But to her and her parents, any prison time is unfair for a crime she didn't commit.

"It's a shame this woman was killed. But it's a shame to crucify someone over this without the truth being told," said Mr. Kyles, who with his wife has been trying to set Connie free since she was sentenced two years ago.

The Kyles have tried, unsuccessfully, to get their daughter's story told and to get her sentence commuted. They have typed a five-page single-spaced version of their story and circulated a petition. The tattered petition has yellowed with time, but more than 250 signatures remain as part of an effort to free Connie Lynn Kyles.

So far the news has not been encouraging. Martha Cobb, who is in charge of commutations for the governor's office, said that Connie's name didn't ring a bell. Her file was sitting dormant with more than 100 similar requests.

"They do take a long time to investigate and put it all together," she said. "And then there's the question of putting it to the governor. The chances are of course not very good for any particular individual."

Statistics on commutations are not very encouraging either. In 1977, 29 of 50 commutation requests were granted in North Carolina, and in 1978

48 of 65 were granted. But in 1979, only 19 of 125 commutation requests were granted by the governor.

Mrs. Cobb said the latest entry in Connie's file was a letter sent to her parents last summer suggesting that they file a Motion for Appropriate Relief in the courts, and which gave the Kyles the toll-free number of the state's lawyer referral service.

But an attorney for Prison Legal Services in Durham, which is considering Connie's case, said that entering a Motion for Appropriate Relief would take thousands of dollars and several years. "You would almost have to take it to the Supreme Court" before the governor would consider legal remedies exhausted — and therefore consider a commutation — said the attorney, Richard Giroux.

He also said that Connie's case would be difficult to appeal because of the guilty plea. The sentence could be attacked for being cruel and unusual punishment and thus violating the eighth amendment, Giroux said, but that would be a "long shot" in view of the Supreme Court's March decision in *Rummel v. Estelle*, which upheld a sentence of life imprisonment for a Texas man who had been convicted three times on forgery charges.

Connie Lynn Kyles is not just a statistic, and yet her story is repeated over and over again. A victim of circumstances and a judicial system which pays to hear psychologists and then ignores what they say, Connie is just one of many prisoners with sentences far exceeding their crimes. Connie's crime, as her parents keep repeating, was just being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

"Stories like Connie's are much more common than any of us would like to think," says Lao Rubert of the Prison and Jail Project of North Carolina. "We frequently hear about

people who have received unnecessarily long sentences for their involvement in a crime. Usually they are poor and have been represented by court-appointed lawyers who haven't had much time to give to their cases. Once a harsh sentence has been handed down, it is difficult for a prisoner to successfully appeal the case even when money is available to hire a lawyer."

Connie, meanwhile, is patiently waiting it out. She's lost weight, passed her high school equivalency test, received a degree in secretarial science, and is now studying upholstery. Mr. Kyles is also studying upholstery, and the two — who could barely speak without yelling when Connie was in high school — plan to go into business together when she gets out.

Day to day, Connie tries to pretend she's not in prison, but every morning when she wakes up it comes as a jolt again. "The first thing, I wake up and I tell myself I'm in here for something I didn't do.

"I just think about being at home, doing things I used to. I miss my puppy. I miss being with little kids. I miss riding around by myself sometimes. I miss being loved on. And I miss my goodnight kisses."

Tears roll quietly down Connie's face. She's learned the art of crying silently.

"I'm just thinking about my family and how it used to be. And when I get out of here I'm going to be so old. I can't sit on their laps anymore. I can't be their little girl. I'm supposed to be a murderer." □

Debbie Galant is a reporter for the Burlington, North Carolina, Daily Times-News. She has also written for the Winston-Salem Journal and Environmental Action magazine.

by Nolan Porterfield. University of Illinois Press, 1979. 460 pp. \$15.00.

Jimmie Rodgers

W by Norm Cohen

We are hardly wanting in biographies of major classical music figures; the bookshelves fairly bulge from the weight of them. Bach, Beethoven, Wagner, Tchaikowsky — each has had his share of Boswells. But the world of popular (I prefer the broader term “vernacular”) music is a different case altogether. Until a few decades ago, it was scarcely considered respectable to listen seriously to such outpourings, let alone pursue such deeper questions as who these artists were and what was responsible for their music. Of the vernacular musics, jazz was the first to find a champion; and then, curiously enough, those champions were Europeans, who took our American music more seriously than we ourselves did. We listened to our own heroes, but we had to look across the Atlantic to read about them. Blues music (earlier called “race,” later “rhythm and blues”) was next to achieve respectability, and again, the pioneering scholars worked from the other side of the puddle — where, incidentally, many blues and jazz greats have eventually migrated in search of greater respect and appreciation.

Hillbilly music (now called “country and western,” or just “country music”) was not to become the object of serious study until the early 1960s — some 40 years after its first tentative commercial beginnings in the studios of the Victor Talking Machine Company and the General Phonograph Corporation in Camden and New York. The reasons for its ugly-duckling treatment are many; one noteworthy reason was simply that blues and jazz music scholarship flourished in a period of growing awareness of black culture and racial injustice. Hillbillies did not find their social or intellectual champions until much later.

The phonograph was patented almost simultaneously in the United States by Thomas A. Edison and in France by

REVIEWS

One Day Only

COAST-TO-COAST TOUR

OF
AMERICA'S
FAMOUS
"BLUE YODELER"

JIMMIE
RODGERS
IN PERSON!



Famous
Victor Star
and

HIS COMPANY
OF ENTERTAINERS

IN A PROGRAM OF THE
GREATEST VARIETY AND FILLED
WITH ENTERTAINMENT AND SURPRISE

Not a city, town or village in America but knows "Jimmie Rodgers" and his "Blue Yodel," his happy, care-free songs, and his guitar. Only a few cities can hear him as his tour is limited on account of his recording engagements with the Victor Talking Machine Company.

LYNN THEATRE

O'DONNELL, TEXAS, Saturday, April 6th, 1929

Tickets on Sale at Corner Drug Store, O'Donnell, Texas; Cannon Variety Store, Lamesa; Thomps on Drug Store, Tahoka.

1st show from 6:30 to 9:00 p. m. 2nd show from 9:00 to 11:30

Charles Cros in 1878. Edison saw his invention primarily as an office machine, and it was marketed as such for several years. Its first use as an entertainment device was in fairs and penny arcades, where wondering customers could drop a coin in a slot, record their own voices for a few moments, and then hear the machine play back a recording that, under favorable conditions, might even have been intelligible. In the early 1890s

cylinder production began in earnest, and the private home became the target for the rapidly growing phonograph industry. Emile Berliner's successful development of the disc record provided the means for the convenient mass production of recordings (early cylinders could not be stamped from a mold, and had to be recorded practically one by one), and by the early 1900s great artists such as Caruso, McCormack and Gluck — as

well as great popular artists, such as Billy Golden, Len Spencer and Arthur Fields — were producing records in the hundreds of thousands. The phonograph industry in the early twentieth century enjoyed a phenomenal growth; it was, after all, the first medium that permitted commercial, professional entertainment to be brought into the private home. The real significance of that development is its impact on the need (or desire) for Americans to make their own musical entertainment. Piano and sheet music sales were given stiff competition from phonographs and records. Not only was it easier to play the phonograph than the piano; the former was portable as well.

The years following World War I, however, saw two developments that spelled setback for the record industry: a postwar recession, and the invention and rapid growth of radio. These — perhaps abetted by the still-popular player piano and the increasing tendency of Americans to take to their automobiles for entertainment rather than stay at home — brought about a decline in record sales in 1923, a trend that was not reversed until the invention of electrical recording in 1925. In the mid-1920s, therefore, the record industry began a desperate search for new ideas to broaden its base and recapture the audience that it had begun to lose to competing forms of entertainment.

It was at this critical juncture in entertainment history that two Southern fiddlers, flushed from a week of excitement at the annual Civil War Veterans' reunion in Richmond, Virginia (June, 1922), decided they were good enough to make some records, and took the train north to Victor's New York offices, where they presented themselves, still in Civil War garb, ready to record. A short year later, an Atlanta furniture and phonograph distributor was in New York attending a dealers' convention at which strategies for upping sales were discussed. At an off moment he ducked into a nearby movie theater for a break and found himself watching a newsreel featuring an old-time fiddlers' convention in the South. A famous Atlanta fiddler came to his mind, and he made a note then and there to suggest that General Phonograph record this local celebrity, whose records he was sure would sell like hotcakes at fairs and Elks' conventions in the north Georgia area.

Out of such tentative beginnings the hillbilly record industry was born, but it grew rapidly. A steady stream of artists of varying skills and styles paraded before the microphones and

recorded fiddle tunes, banjo songs, tragic ballads and sentimental ones, and religious pieces that they and their neighbors loved to hear and had grown up with. Different as their variegated styles and skills were, however, they all had in common a cultural heritage. They were at one with their audience, and the music they made was their own music.

But the well of folk music, though deep, was not (commercially) inexhaustible, and those folk performers who could not tap other streams fell by the wayside as the industry looked for performers who were from within the tradition, but were creative enough to fashion new material in its image. One of the music industry's most important record producers was Ralph Peer, who built a music-publishing empire out of his realization that each number that his black or white performers borrowed, wrote or rewrote could be copyrighted; and if his company was assigned the copyright, it would be more valuable to him than any salary the record company could possibly pay him. It was Peer who named the fledgling "hillbilly" and "race" record genres, and it was he who first recorded some of the great pioneers in each of these fields in his capacity as A&R (artist and repertoire) man, first for General Phonograph, producers of the Okeh label, and then for Victor. It was in the employ of the latter company that, in one session in Bristol, Tennessee/Virginia, in August, 1927, he first met and recorded two of country music's most important pioneers: Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter family.

Jimmie Rodgers, born in 1897 in Meridian, Mississippi, was the son of a struggling railroad worker and his rather frail wife, who died when young James was five or six years old. Jimmie's early years were marked by much traveling, first at his relatives' hands, as he was shuttled from one household to another, and then at his own, as if the migratory spirit, once planted and nurtured, began to bloom of its own accord. Like his father, he took to railroad working; but unlike his forebears, he decided that his goal was to live the life of the entertainer. In his teens he embarked on a series of musical adventures that for many years looked as if they would lead nowhere, but that make considerably more sense with the hindsight of his later successes. The 1910s saw him grow to manhood, but not without frequent bouts of illness— chest colds, pleurisy and the like — that either presaged or laid the groundwork for his later struggle with

the disease that would claim his life at the age of 35 — tuberculosis. The same decade saw him marry, in 1917, and then be separated from his first wife within the same year; then meet Carrie at about the same time and become married to her in 1920. The facts suggest that this marriage, too, was far from perfect, but it lasted (*de jure*, at least) until Rodgers' death in 1933.

By August of 1927, when Rodgers met Peer in Bristol, the tuberculosis had become a full-fledged reality — so much so that he had to give up the rigors of railroading, and try to make a livelihood as a musician for himself, his devoted wife and his six-year-old daughter. At this pursuit, despite a fierce determination, an unbridled optimism, and a respectable quantity of musical skill and savvy, he had not met with much success. In fact, one wonders, after reading the facts of his life as Nolan Porterfield has for the first time uncovered and published them, how much longer his little universe could have survived if the recordings of 1927 had not brought a stunning reversal in his fortunes. In August he came to Peer's door a struggling musician who couldn't even get along with his recently formed "hillbilly orchestra;" in November, with fame still eluding him, and tired of awaiting its phone call, he took matters in his own hands and went back to New York to make himself available for another recording session. It was the results of this effort that bore evidence that a great career was in the making. But not instantly: his first royalty statement in January, 1928, declared that his first record earned him only \$27. But he was on his way, and before the year was out, as Porterfield notes, "he would broadcast his own weekly radio show from the nation's capital, headline a major vaudeville tour through the South, and make a triumphant return to his hometown," earning \$2,000 a month in record royalties alone. Five pain-racked years later, with 110 recordings to his name, and an endless string of vaudeville and tent-show appearances, he was dying in a New York hotel after sweating and coughing through a final recording session that must have been nothing short of macabre.

Rodgers died in May, 1933, but neither his fame nor his music went to the grave with him. He is still beloved in his native Mississippi and adopted Texas; his songs are still recorded by top country performers, and there are still old-timers who can tell with excitement of their first meeting with him — hearing him sing, shaking his hand or

sitting, as a child, on his knee. If Rodgers had a greater gift than his music, it was his charm, his warmth and his humanity. The common folk of the South were his people, and not disease or pain, not fame or success could keep him from them. His widow, Carrie, in her own early biography, *My Husband Jimmie Rodgers*, remembered many occasions when he would give his last dollar to a friend – or even a passing acquaintance – who seemed more in need of it at the moment than Rodgers was.

Through music, Rodgers created an impact which is still felt in country music today. He was – with the possible exception of the anomalous Vernon Dalhart – the first country artist to reach successfully into the folk, blues, jazz and pop traditions to come up with a musical style of near-national acceptance. When he died – in fact, even before – there was a retinue of aspiring young country singers who took to learning his songs note for note, his yodels nuance for nuance, his guitar runs strum for erratic strum. Gene Autry, Ernest Tubb, Hank Snow, Jimmie Davis and Cliff Carlisle are only a few of the country musicians of the 1930s whose careers started largely as Rodgers imitators.

If the details of Rodgers' life were, to many fans, shrouded in obscurity, legends were invented to fill in the gaps. Biographical accounts were manufactured on the basis of a few newspaper accounts, hazy memories, and a legacy of recordings. Information released by self-serving record companies and publishers, not to mention a biography by his recently bereft widow, mixed facts with fantasy; legal matters surrounding two marriages and their offspring resulted in the stonewalling of some facts and the interment of others. *Jimmie Rodgers* is a book born of the author's love for Jimmie Rodgers' music and a desire finally to establish the truth about his life. A native Texan, steeped in Rodgers lore and a lifelong fan of his music, Porterfield uses his skills as an English professor and novelist to produce a biography that is as remarkable for its readability as for its wealth of hitherto unknown details. I know of no other musician's biography that combines both aspects more winningly.

Wealth of detail is not, for most readers, its own reward. Porterfield's exploration must be judged on what it brings to bear on key questions surrounding Rodgers and his music: (1) what were its sources; (2) what/who was responsible for his commercial success; and (3) what has made his music and memory so enduring in

American country music? Pertinent to the first question are all the details Porterfield has uncovered concerning the backgrounds of Rodgers' compositions, co-composers, and accompanists; to the second are the long sections dealing with Ralph Peer, Eli Oberstein and other executives involved with the production and distribution of popular records and music; and to the third is almost the entire book, capturing – to borrow a phrase – the mind of the South, and the cultural milieu of an era in capsule form.

Porterfield's is not the first book-length study of Rodgers. I have already mentioned Carrie Rodgers' *My Husband Jimmie Rodgers*, published two years after his death. Mrs. Rodgers, one can assume, had several motives in writing (or having ghost-written) her account. There was of course a financial one, not only in the returns from the book's sales directly, but in royalties from additional records that would be sold if Rodgers' memory could be enhanced a bit. Perhaps equally important was her desire to eradicate any suggestions of less-than-perfect marital bliss. While her own account leaves a very rosy image of that relationship, Porterfield's extensive interviews with friends, relatives and business associates clearly demonstrate that the marriage was strained considerably in its final years, so much so that the last year may actually have been lived out in nearly complete separation. In this deception Carrie would have had the tacit support of the Peer publishing empire and RCA Victor, whose financial interests might have been hurt had Rodgers' fans – Southerners who were decades behind their city cousins in accepting separation, divorce, infidelity, and adultery – suspected that their idol was less than ideal. A more recent biography, *Jimmie the Kid*, by two Englishmen, Mike Paris and Chris Comber (1977), did much to gather the scattered writings pertaining to the Rodgers story; but operating from across the Atlantic, the authors were severely hampered in doing any firsthand fieldwork. Their study is, for most purposes, superseded by Porterfield's. The several discographies that have been compiled of Rodgers' recordings are also all superseded by Porterfield's own, which comprises 50 pages in his book. It is one of the best discographies of a country music artist that has been published.

The bulk of the book is devoted to a chronological accounting of Rodgers' life and activities, with a long but useful digression into the background of the Victor Talking Machine Com-

pany and the activities of Ralph Peer. Briefer digressions (if it is fair to call them that) occur with the mention of each person – musician, songwriter, showman – who played a role, however minor, in the Rodgers story. Here Porterfield's tenacity in ferreting out hitherto unknown details is particularly evident, and the result is a model study of a country music giant and the supporting cast that helped to make him great. As each recording session comes up in the narrative, Porterfield turns to the recordings themselves, discussing the background of each composition, noting the identity and role of the sidemen, and commenting with affection on the aesthetic merits of each piece. This is the only area of the book in which Porterfield ventures any significant departure from objectivity; and while any fan will quibble with some of his evaluations, his comments are generally refreshing and frequently insightful.

Apart from the obvious fact of the immense quantity of details surrounding Rodgers' life that have never seen publication before, several substantive issues emerge in the study that deserve comment. First is the delicate matter of Rodgers' first marriage, to Stella Kelly – a subject completely avoided in Carrie Rodgers' book or in any company publicity. The fact that Porterfield does not record Stella's current last name or whereabouts suggests to me that she is still concerned about publicizing her association with the struggling young entertainer more than 60 years ago. Yet I find Porterfield's treatment discrete and sensitive. On the subject of Rodgers' relations with his second wife, Carrie, Porterfield also presents new information that paints a picture clearly at variance with the legend we are used to.

A more interesting issue, musically, is Ralph Peer's curious efforts continually to surround Rodgers with sidemen on recording sessions – often musicians he had never played with previously, and, almost as often, not country musicians. Porterfield's own evaluation is that Rodgers performed best alone, that his solo pieces best reflect his musical genius, whereas his accompanists were often ill-suited to his style and sometimes had difficulty following his unique phrasing. One possible explanation – that Peer, who demonstrably had no fondness for "hillbilly" music, Rodgers' or otherwise, was exercising his own aesthetic prerogatives in hope of "improving" the music – seems untenable, since Peer was above all a businessman, and would have set his own tastes aside in the face of a successful for-

mula. Could it be that Rodgers' accompanied performances outsold his solo ones? The fragmentary sales figures available do not at all support this hypothesis. Porterfield also raises the possibility that Peer's concern for Rodgers' health prompted him to find accompanists in the hope of lessening the physical hardships that tuberculosis-wracked Rodgers had to endure. This explanation, too, founders, in the face of Peer's permitting (or encouraging) Jimmie Rodgers' final recording session when he was so weak that a cot was needed in the studio so he could rest between "takes." We are left, then, having to conclude, with Porterfield, that Peer's innovative capacities and continuing demand for novelty outweighed his businessman's instinct not to meddle with a successful formula. But I am unhappy with this conclusion; it suggests that Peer, with all his music-business acumen, did not perceive the essential difference between the hillbilly/folk music audience and the popular music

audience: in the former, familiarity and conservatism are as valued as are freshness and innovation in the latter.

Porterfield's study also exposes one of the ironies of our mental reconstruction of the music of the 1920s and 1930s: while the tangible artifacts from the era are the phonograph records — and recordings are the primary yardstick by which we measure the success of artists of the period — records were not the primary medium either to the artists or to their audiences. Personal appearances were far more important; in fact, some well-known musicians of the period disdained making records because they saw little value in it monetarily. The medium of the phonograph has served as a filter that colors our impressions of the period, and it is only by dedicated and patient examination of the other available sources — newspaper accounts, published interviews, diaries, correspondence, legal and commercial documents, and memories of survivors (and Porterfield has sifted

through them all) — that we can balance our perspective.

Rodgers, as Porterfield amply demonstrates, seemed happiest when performing to an audience, and only incapacitating pain could keep him from doing a gig in towns of any description before audiences of any size. On second thought, perhaps I should broaden that last statement: the real lesson of Porterfield's study is that Rodgers was happiest when he was with his kind of people — whether singing to them, drinking or swapping stories with them, giving a helping handout, or just shaking hands. Herein lies, I suspect, a major clue to Jimmie Rodgers' popularity. His music was great, granted — but he genuinely loved his people and went out of his way to show it. His fans reciprocated by loving him in return. □

Norm Cohen is the author of Long Steel Rail: The Railroad in American Folksong.

by John Gaventa. University of Illinois Press, 1980. 267 pp. \$16.50.

Power and Powerlessness

by Floyd Hunter

The good thing about John Gaventa's study *Power and Powerlessness*, so far as he goes, is that he is right. He dares speak truthfully, and by comparison goes further than most.

The bad thing, about which he writes so truthfully, is international, industrial thievery by British and American neo-feudalists of lands and resources.

Gaventa's study of a mining area straddling the Tennessee-Kentucky border systematically answers some very fundamental questions:

In a situation of glaring inequality does hidden rebellion exist along with too apparent quiescence? Why, in social relationships involving the domination of a non-elite by an elite, does challenge to that domination so infrequently occur? What is there in situations of social deprivation that prevents issues from arising, griev-

ances from being voiced, or interests from being recognized? Why, in an oppressed community where one intuitively might expect upheaval, does one instead find, or appear to find, quiescence? Under what conditions and against what obstacles does rebellion begin to emerge? In brief, "why powerlessness of a majority in the face of power of a minority?"

Gaventa places these questions against the forces of power at work in the community and rural areas around "The Magic City of the South," Middlesboro, Kentucky. For answers, he looks first at community power as a part of a larger, better-known area of power and inequality, the whole of Appalachia. He then moves back to relationships of power in its smaller community context, and finally expands to its international dimension: a British multinational corporation, the Lowson industrial empire, headquartered in London, England, and localized as the American Association, Ltd. This oligopoly controls the major portion of the area's land, some 80,000 acres. The story told, as I see it, has long roots in the conquests of Caesar, landed feudal systems of the Middle Ages, the takeover of the Anglo-Saxons by Richard of France, the enclosures of common lands of the British Isles, and at last the gradual assumption of economic and political power by bankers and industrialists of America accompanied by promises of freedom from want, but at last

providing dispossession of property to all everywhere. It is a long story still needing universal denial by all people. Middlesboro to date, as Gaventa so ably presents it, localizes and reaffirms the long, dreary and tragic tale of the history of world conquest by industrial feudalism and the failure of people to remedy from place to place, and generation to generation, the essential causes of their powerlessness. None are free who are dispossessed. None but a few are at last possessed of very much but plastic splendor in any industrialized state in the world of today, East or West.

The case in point, Middlesboro, picks up the thread of history in the latter decades of the nineteenth century when, through sharp practices in dealing with mountaineers of the region, American Association, Ltd., was put together by British capital, 20 million pounds of it. At that time, lands were purchased outright for ridiculously minor sums, five dollars an acre — a trifle more or less throughout Appalachia — by both British and American interests. Where sale could not be easily effected, fraud, deceit and strong-arm tactics made do. The people dispossessed either "moved on to another mountain" or submitted to the injustices involved. Over the intervening years, those who remained witnessed the installation of overseers of the land, local elite political quislings and industrial gaulitiers of absentee corporate groups, who for



five or six generations have controlled all other local and state political officers, courts, business opportunists, the churches and educational facilities through their cultural comptrollers.

It is indeed occupied territory. All dissent has long since been pacified; that is, all dissent has been stopped before it may have reached any effective proportions. If one cares to look closely, visible forces of power are utilized to keep the population quiescent. It is not, as Gaventa points out, a fault of the people — laziness, inbreeding, cultural or congenital muteness — but the lash of persistent power elements and prohibitions from top to bottom and bottom to top that keeps *pax industria* in being. Black lung, poverty and touches of poorly

constituted education, along with other conscious applications of mental stultifications by union charades of democracy and financial autocracy, helps to maintain the malaise of powerlessness.

The essence of Gaventa's message is clear, to be sure, a rundown of more of the same. As with the Romans who used copper for money who said, "The rich are those who have most of the people's copper," so the Middlesboro dispossessed know that a few at home and a few abroad have claim to most of the wealth whether in the form of farm land, coal, timber or money. They do not often dispute that claim. They did so recently, however, and with Gaventa's good help they made a movie of their plight, one related to

company practices which strip them of valuable coal lands, pollute their environment with strip mining and treat them as less than the earth of which they have been dispossessed. The movie was shown on British television. With a couple of exceptions, it has not been shown to American audiences.

Stung by the feeble protests of the people involved, those asking, "What are you trying to do to us?" the company cried back in furious anger: "Will you move out of the home we own?" or "Will you vacate your job as of now?" "Will you pay up all you owe on your auto as within the instant?" Any such questions historically have been emphasized by rumbles of violence. The responses are those of pacification, today more or less psychological in nature, with hints of what might come and what often does. It is reminiscent of Caesar's pacification of restive Gauls. He decided on stern measures, that Roman peace might prevail for a very long time. When lesser measures had finally failed, Caesar cut off both hands of all Gauls he could catch, some tens of thousands of them.

In the Middlesboro case, the cutoff was of lands, the local bread basket. Over time, a little better than 100 years, this sector of rural Kentucky-Tennessee, as in so many others, has been denuded first of ownership by the many, and then of trees, coal, land fertility and living streams. Any people remaining are struck speechless; powerless.

After a suitable silence they were told to get off the land, certainly any that the company owns in the Valley. There is no place here, they were told, for agitators. The company manager indicated that he was tired of being bothered by all and especially by the media. The biggest mistake the company had made, he said, had been to allow the people to remain in the Valley after the shaft mines had closed. If they had torn down all the houses on their land, the company said, they would not have been subject to such harassments. Harassments like: "What are you trying to do to us?" The pattern is familiar to the majority who persist in inhabiting Appalachia.

Gaventa's story differs from many others of similar content in that he gathered data about the "bottom folks" and their reactions to the top ones rather than the other way around. The story, however, ends much the same as if he had started at the top. The powerful are still in charge. The people are still moving to somewhere else, this time to some city, preferably in the North, rather than "to another

mountain."

In Western industrial society, it makes no difference whether one starts looking for power at the top of the heap or at the bottom. One always finds it at the top. This is partly due to millennial cultural inertia within the elite sector itself. Super-antiquated ideas of economic factors encrust the thinking of that small, power-driven sector of society, their principal thought being the notion of scarcity, which motivates them to continue feudal practices of violence and dispossession accumulation.

Gaventa, social scientist, helps one to "see" the relevance of movement and inertia by moving his story from the present of community life, to its past, then back to the present with industrial feudalism in tow. He stops there, however, with his powerful and powerless people frozen in dreadful suspense. Can the powerful ever be deflected from their malicious purposes? Can the powerless ever move from the awful strictures, power, status and violence that binds them?

If Gaventa is taken as seriously as he should be, the answer to these rhetorical questions must be yes. The very dimensions of power he encompasses demand a positive answer. His community is not isolated from its relevant, contemporary cultural context: its region, its nation, its international and its historical connection. Its long-term history of feudal practices, one minority atop a beleaguered majority, becomes visible. Contemporary society clearly becomes more of the same. One can ask little

more from social science than to explain this.

However, the people, always ahead of the social scientists, say what is on their minds, neatly, without any roundabout: "If you are a slave workin for nothin it gets old," "Work-in folks must stick together against the bosses and the rich folks." Their experiences in an earlier epoch of union organizing of the coal mines had taught them the formula of freedom: (1) recognize one's condition of bondage, and (2) do something about it. Betrayed by those who organized them, and who then corrupted themselves, the people remember the words which changed their lives, even if but briefly. They know that their own condition must *not* be internalized as self-blame. They know that not only forces of the community exterior to them, but also corporate monopolistic forces as far away as London, England, keep them powerless.

How they do so is another matter, another lesson to be learned; namely, that these forces now manipulate them psychologically to their detriment. Gaventa has provided a correct answer to what ails the people of Middlesboro. The next proposition, that of what to do about the condition, Gaventa did not take up as a problem.

A few contemporary writers, however, still are taking up that problem. Two recent works of "what to do" would especially seem to dovetail nicely with Gaventa's "what it is": Lappe and Collins, *Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity*, and Yuan-Tsung Chen, *The Dragon's Village*.

These works suggest two classic remedies for chronic dispossession. The first puts down the myth that there is not enough to go around by demonstratively stating that there is enough arable land in the world (including Appalachia), *if properly managed*, to feed twice the present world population. The convincing arguments page after page demolish the prevailing arguments of universal land scarcity and the need for massive capitalist factory farms around the world. The Chen book, for its part, skillfully tells us step by step how another desolate spot ravished for centuries by landlordism found its way out by choosing a government that allowed the people to find a better life. They found that the ways they had accepted uncritically (as the right and only ways of doing) were indeed very, very wrong, and they took quite simple conscious steps to correct their errors. They divided the land and began to work it cooperatively. Those stories are needed to round out Gaventa's account and those ways are needed to straighten out the erroneous ways of Middlesboro. One may hopefully await Gaventa's "what to do" book that will, I'm sure, match his "what it is." □

Floyd Hunter's classic analysis of Atlanta, Community Power Structure, gave us a new name for those who rule and set the standard for future "power structure" studies. His latest book, Community Power Succession (UNC Press, 1980), updates his 1953 survey with eloquence and insight.

by Gordon McKinney. University of North Carolina Press, 1978. 227 pp. \$18.00.

Southern Mountain Republicans



by Doug Gamble

One might reasonably expect a book entitled *Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community* to deal with the nature and dynamics of politics, power and community in Appalachia. Unfortunately, McKinney's preoccupation with electoral politics does not allow for a consider-

ation of the relationships between elections, politicians and society, nor does it lead him to state or examine his own methodological and theoretical assumptions. Thus, his treatment of the material in this book does not contribute much to understanding how Republican political activity in the late nineteenth century affected Appalachian society.

In 1891 and 1892, coal miners in and around Anderson County in eastern Tennessee forcefully rebelled against the use of prisoners of the state as nonunion workers in the mines of the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company. The coalfields of eastern Tennessee and Kentucky were alive with an organized working class revolt against the coal companies' interests (see *Southern Exposure*, Vol. I, No. 3-4). This rebellion was political in nature; yet McKinney, who wrote this book in part to help

explain changes in Appalachian society, mentions the Anderson County miners' insurrection only once, as an example of the emergence in the 1890s of an industrial labor force in Appalachia. He is much more interested in the career of Anderson County's Republican boss and congressman, Leonidas Houk, than in the miners' collective responses, and the significance of those responses, to the state's support of the New York-based Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company.

Politics for McKinney appears to be little more than competition among candidates for public office. McKinney does not deal with why politicians wanted office or how they went about getting elected. He discusses neither the nature and dynamics of power nor who stood to benefit from its use or to suffer from its loss. Instead he writes of electoral politics as a game

for public-spirited men interested only in representing their communities.

Which local interests did the Republicans represent? McKinney says that the region's improved transportation system encouraged outside commercial interests to invest in the mountains. His evidence shows the key role the Republicans played in improving that system and in opening the area to outsiders, but he does not consider the conflicts of interest involved. It is almost as if the railroads were built by the impersonal force of industrialization, while the Republican party, dominated by "nationally oriented" men, acted magnanimously as "spokesman for the mountain region." The party in the 1880s was "the orator and defender of a community identity" and a "shield against the outside world." But, as McKinney notes without comment, Houk championed regional autonomy and "local interests" by receiving "loans" of \$19,000 from the Louisville and Nashville Railroad; Virginia's Republican strongman William Mahone was the president of several railroads; and West Virginia's Stephen Elkins built his career as a nationally prominent Republican and industrial tycoon and spokesman for the coal and railroad industries.

McKinney argues persuasively that the Republican party changed its emphasis after Reconstruction and concentrated on supporting the interests of the emerging industrial capitalists, North and South. He also writes clearly that the "mountain region of the upper South was experiencing the impact of industrialization. The vast mineral and timber resources of the region were being exploited . . ." and "a new professional class of businessmen, lawyers and engineers came to dominate Appalachian society. . . ." Many of this new class were Republicans who lived in the mountains and who would benefit from their party's power and policies. McKinney shows that the process in which they participated fundamentally and permanently changed the nature and dynamics of politics and community in Appalachia, but he does not say why or how.

Part of the problem is that McKinney does not ask questions that can generate an explanation. He worries about static and quantifiable characteristics of the voters (race, religious affiliation, income) more than about to whom they were related, how they made their livings, or to whom they owed money or their jobs. Essentially the same limitations characterize his treatment of the politicians, so that Houk's ties to local and outside capitalists do not strike McKinney as

particularly important. His evidence suggests that the Appalachian working class was victimized by capitalists from both within and outside the region, and that the Republican party increasingly was their political party, but neither the material here nor McKinney's use of it tells us much about how this happened.

Politics in late nineteenth century Appalachia, as elsewhere in the South, revolved around county courthouses, kinship networks and residential patterns. This was especially true when most people were relatively self-sufficient and uninvolved in commercial and industrial capitalism. McKinney is correct to emphasize the irrelevance of the federal government to most Appalachians from the Civil War through Reconstruction, as well as the fact that the local and national Republican leaders by 1880 increasingly were using the federal government to support and stimulate the penetration of industrial capitalism into Appalachia.

However, the focus on elections and politicians, rather than on the dynamics of the acquisition and use of political power, keeps McKinney from examining the context of what he describes. Since he does not explain very clearly why some people and counties in the Southern mountains were strongly Democratic, he cannot tell us very much about what local electoral party politics had to do with the growth in Appalachia of industrial capitalism, or vice-versa. A rough correlation between Republicanism and white racial homogeneity, which is the only correlation McKinney found between Republican voting strength and demographic variables, cannot in itself explain anything, especially how or why any particular person or group of people voted.

If McKinney's treatment of the concept of an Appalachian community were more useful than his static discussion of politics, this book might still help explain the dynamics of political and social change. Unfortunately, he assumes the existence of such a community, telling us neither what Appalachia was in the late nineteenth century nor how it was different from anywhere else. He warns against regional stereotypes and then introduces the hard-drinking congressman Houk as "in every way a typical mountain man." He acknowledges the emergence of a new capitalist class and the existence of fundamental class conflicts; yet he sees class violence like the Coal Creek war in Anderson County as the failure of the new industrial middle class and the traditional mountaineers "to under-

stand" each others' "motivations." Implicit in his analysis is the belief that if the miners in Anderson County had understood that the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company and Houk's Republican party were committed to "local interests," surely they would not have acted so ugly.

By focusing on the behavior of Republican officeseekers, McKinney has missed an opportunity to describe the political culture of Appalachia — the relationships between Appalachian society and all of its political parties and institutions — or the relationships between the Republican party, including the people who voted for its candidates, and the rest of Appalachian society. The political elites upon whom McKinney focuses were important, but they were not all who were involved in politics and the Appalachian community. The story of the electorate remains untold, as does that of the relationships between the political elite and the political economy it helped shape.

With one exception, the reviews of McKinney's book in national history journals have ranged from neutral to quite favorable. One historian points out McKinney's failure to describe or define Appalachia; another would have liked more consideration of the men who controlled the Republican party in the 1880s. Two other reviewers note the support retained in Appalachia by the Democratic party and wonder how different the parties really were.* More significant is the fact that no reviewer has questioned McKinney's basic conceptual and theoretical assumptions. This lapse offers little comfort to people concerned that historians are not sufficiently interested in "timeless moral questions about the uses of power and the consequences of choices," to quote Eric Foner. Understanding the acquisition and use of control of the state is of considerable importance to understanding power and society in America and Appalachia; unfortunately, neither McKinney nor his published critics seem to have given much thought to these matters.□

Doug Gamble is on the staff of the Highlander Research and Education Center.

* The reviewers were Frank Mathins (*Journal of Southern History*, November, 1979), Nancy Schrom Dye (*Appalachian Journal*, Spring, 1980), Robert Durden (*Civil War History*, March, 1980), Roger Hart (*American Historical Review*, October, 1979) and Michael Chesson (*Journal of American History*, December, 1979). Chesson, and to a lesser degree Hart, were generally negative about the book.

Shorts

Mean Things Happening in This Land. By H.L. Mitchell. 1979. \$10.95. Order from: STFU Association, P.O. Box 2617, Montgomery, AL 36105.

On Friday, July 13, 1934, 11 white men and seven black men met south of Tyrnza, Arkansas, to form the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, this country's first truly integrated union. *Mean Things Happening in This Land* is the story of this improbable union's remarkable co-founder, H.L. Mitchell.

Mitchell recounts the adventures of his early years in the rural South — the events that shaped a lifelong commitment to social justice. In 1917 he witnessed his first lynching, of a boy little older than himself. At age eight he was a farmer, sharecropper at 13 and a socialist soon thereafter. Mitchell's travels throughout the South organizing the union, his life "on the run" and his encounters with such figures as Henry Wallace and Norman Thomas are all vividly recounted. His book is both an autobiography and a history of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. But it is also the seldom seen, seldom told story of the thousands of rural Southerners who have long struggled for social justice and racial equality.

Mean Things Happening in This Land is fascinating, entertaining and moving. We highly recommend it. Readers of *Rural Advance* can order their own copies autographed by H.L. Mitchell direct from the STFU Association for \$10.95. Proceeds from the sale of books will benefit the Association and former members of the union. With your book order you will also receive a membership card for the STFU Association.

This review of Mean Things is reprinted from Rural Advance, a publication of the Frank Porter Graham Center by the Rural Advancement Fund/National Sharecroppers Fund.

Lost Highway: Journeys and Arrivals of American Musicians. By Peter Guralnick. Godine, 1979. 357 pp. \$8.95.

This is a handsome, highly readable, unpretentious volume of portraits of blues and country musicians, sidemen and hangers on. Background material, interviews and analyses are reported from a deep conviction "that the music is out there." That is to say, Peter Guralnick knows that popular music is neither records nor radio nor trends, though these are part of it, but that music is part of our living culture. The book features the lives of 20-odd artists of whom five were born in Mississippi (including Elvis) and four in Tennessee; of those remaining all, save two, originated in the South.

Guralnick's approach to the subject is illustrated by the fact that although he devotes much attention to Elvis and holds Howlin' Wolf as his idol, he exhibits a special sympathy for the music of lesser-known Sleepy LaBeef. Sleepy is the prototypical stoic roadman, a durable if somewhat battered journeyman musician. Like other roadmen, he must endure the indifference of the truckers, mechanics and hardhats who hardly notice who plays the music at the honky-tonk tonight. We meet LaBeef playing guitar, fiddle and piano with skill and conviction, varying his repertoire with doses of blues, rockabilly and gospel, adapting his material and style to fit any audience, wild or mellow, a scholar in his own way with a touching humility that seems to guarantee that his level of craft will stay among the highest.

There is much to recommend this book, including its highly literate prose style. Indeed, this is one of the features that sets *Lost Highway* apart from other books on popular culture. It is also rare for its high quality of photography and the unobtrusive, thoroughly neutral integrations of illustrations with text. □

Charles Sawyer is the author of The Arrival of B.B. King: The Authorized Biography of the Foremost Blues Singer and Guitarist of Our Times.

The Unfulfilled Promise of Vocational Education: A Look at Sex and Race Equity in Georgia. By Ginny Looney. 1980. 62 pp. \$5.00. Order from: Vocational Education Monitoring Project, ACLU of Georgia, 88 Walton St., NW, Atlanta, GA 30303.

One of the keys to increasing the salaries of women and minorities

lies in broadening their occupational training. Forecaster Leonard Lecht envisions the vocational educational system playing a major role in this effort, though he recognizes that success ultimately depends on the willingness of employers to hire graduates from the programs. "As the largest of the publicly supported occupational training programs, the vocational educational system is strategically situated to prepare more women and nonwhites for desirable careers in which they have been poorly represented in the past," he says.

Clearly, the challenge to the educational system is to expose students at an early age to the realities of the labor market. Girls need to know that they will be working outside the home, because they will need the money just as badly as will their brothers and boyfriends. They need to



know that two-thirds of the women working in 1978 were single, widowed or divorced, or were married to men making less than \$10,000 per year; that one of every eight women workers is the head of a family and among minority women workers, one in four; that more mothers with children under 18 work outside the home than do not; that in fact the popular ideal of the family of four with father working and mother staying home caring for the children is now a myth for all but seven percent of the households in this country.

Since vocational education in the past has contributed to the stereotyping of job roles, Congress made the elimination of sex bias a major focus of the 1976 Vocational Education Amendments. Because Congress knew that the removal of barriers would not necessarily mean a rush of students

into nontraditional programs, the legislation provides for affirmative efforts to overcome the previous socialization which tracked men and women into sex-stereotyped jobs. As part of this effort, each state was required to hire a sex equity coordinator and to spend \$50,000 per year on the elimination of sex bias. The states were also required to adopt policies and procedures to end sex bias and to create incentives for local school systems to encourage nontraditional enrollment and develop model training and placement programs.

How well is this being done in Georgia? As this report reveals, much more progress and continuing sex equity legislation are needed.

— from the introduction to *The Unfulfilled Promise*.

Books on the South

This list consists of books published since August, 1980. Book entries include works up to January, 1981. All books were published in 1980 unless otherwise noted. All dissertations are from doctoral candidates and appeared in the Dissertation Abstracts Index between June and August, 1980. All dissertations dated 1980 unless otherwise noted.

The entries are grouped under several broad categories for your convenience. Mention of a book here does not preclude its being reviewed in a future issue. Unsolicited reviews of publications of general interest to our readers are welcome. Recent works are preferred.

Copies of the dissertations are available from: Xerox University Microfilms, Dissertation Copies, P.O. Box 1764, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. The cost is \$7.50 for microfilm and \$15 for xerographic.

ECONOMICS, HISTORY AND POLITICS

Afro-American History: Challenges in Historiography, ed. by Robert L. Clarke (Washington: Howard University Press). \$15.00.

"The Black Community of Davis Bend: The Pursuit of a Dream," by Janet Sharp Hermann. University of California, Berkeley, 1979.

"Black Robes, Black Faces: The Background, Recruitment and Role Perceptions

of Black Judges in the United States," by Michael David Smith. Johns Hopkins University, 1978.

The Black Worker: The Era of Post-War Prosperity and the Great Depression, 1920 to 1936, ed. by Philip S. Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press). \$17.50.

Bullets, Ballots and Rhetoric: Confederate Policy for the U.S. Presidential Contest of 1864, by Larry E. Nelson (University of Alabama Press). \$15.50.

"Changes in Party Competitiveness and the Evolution of Interparty Processes: The North Carolina Republican Party," by Arlon Keith Kemple. UNC-Chapel Hill, 1979.

The Chickasaw Freedmen: A People Without a Country, by Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press). \$25.00.

"Class, Politics and Regional Development in Proprietary North Carolina (1697-1720)," by Charles Bryan Lowry. University of Florida, 1979.

"Coal Men and Coal Towns: Development of the Smokeless Coalfields of Southern West Virginia, 1873-1923," by Charles Kenneth Sullivan. University of Pittsburgh, 1979.

Competition and Coercion: Blacks in the American Economy, 1865 to 1914, by Robert Higgs (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). \$6.95.

"Concealed Under Petticoats: Married Women's Property and the Laws of Texas, 1840-1913," by Kathleen Elizabeth Lazarou. Rice University.

"Creation of an American State: Politics in North Carolina, 1765-1789," by Penelope Sue Smith. Rice University.

Deep Like the River: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831 to 1865, by Thomas L. Webber (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.). \$5.95.

"Determinants of Race Consciousness and Class Consciousness Among Blacks of a Southern City," by Kathleen Marie Handy. Louisiana State University, 1979.

"Discrimination — Its Costs and Effects on Minority Groups in the South," by Robert Andrew Batts. University of Kentucky, 1979.

"An Economic Analysis of Debt Level and Resource Acquisition for Two Sizes of Mississippi Delta Row Crop Farms," by Amin Abd El-Aziz Montasser Ali. Mississippi State University, 1979.

"An Empirical Selection of Counties and Centers That Reflect Potential for Further Growth in Nonmetropolitan Areas in Tennessee," by Suvan Tun. University of Tennessee.

"The Enactment of Bilingual Education Legislation in Texas, 1969-1973," by Jose Esteban Vega. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

"Free Silver and Alabama Politics, 1890-1896," by Jerry Wayne DeVine. Auburn University.

Freedom and Prejudice: The Legacy of Slavery in the United States and Brazil, by Robert B. Toplin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981). \$19.95.

"A History of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, 1930-1942," by Julius Wayne Dudley. University of Cincinnati, 1979.

"Influences on Legislative Decision-Making in North Carolina," by Ann Rachel Friedman Tickamyer. UNC-Chapel Hill, 1979.

"Integration Practices of a Selected Group of North Carolina Secondary School Principals," by George William Seagraves. Duke University, 1979.

"Labor in the South: A Case Study of Memphis — The 1968 Sanitation Strike and Its Effect on an Urban Community," by Earl Green, Jr. New York University.

"The Lynching of Mack Charles Parker in Poplarville, Mississippi, April 25, 1959," by Edwin Howard Smead, Jr. University of Maryland, 1979.

Man Over Money: The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism, by Bruce Palmer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press). \$19.50.

"Miners, Millhands and Mountaineers: The Modernization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930," by Ronald D. Eller. UNC-Chapel Hill, 1979.

"The Montgomery, Alabama, Bus Boycott, 1955-56," by Lamont Henry Yeakey. Columbia University, 1979.

"New England Journalism and the Questions of Slavery, the South and Abolitionism, 1820-1861," by Randall Richardson Butler, II. Brigham Young University, 1979.

"North Carolina and the Cherokee: The Quest for Land on the Eve of the American Revolution, 1754-1776," by Jerry Clyde Cashion. UNC-Chapel Hill, 1979.

Organizing Dixie: Organizing Alabama Workers in the Industrial Era, by Philip Taft (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981). \$29.95.

"Perceptions of Decision-Making in Rural Communities: A Study of Jackson and Clinton, Louisiana," by Herman Gibson, II. Louisiana State University, 1979.

A Piece of the Pie: Blacks and White Immigrants Since 1880, by Stanley Lieber-son (Berkeley: University of California Press). \$19.95.

"The Plantation Mistress: Another Side of Southern Slavery, 1780-1835," by Catherine Clinton. Princeton University.

"Planter Preferences: A Study of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina," by Daniel Curtis Littlefield. Johns Hopkins University, 1977.

"The Political Aspects of the Texas Tideland Controversy," by Lindsay Escobe Pack. Texas A&M University, 1979.

"Political Institutions in Virginia, 1619-1660," by Jon Keith Kukla. University of Toronto.

Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War, by Eric Foner (New York: Oxford University Press). \$15.95.

Population of the South: Structure and Change in Social Demographic Context, ed. by Dudley L. Poston, Jr., and Robert H. Weller (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). \$25.00.

Prayers for Dark People, by W.E.B. DuBois (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press). \$10.00.

Prosperity Road: The New Deal, Tobacco and North Carolina, by Anthony J. Badger (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press). \$20.00.

Reformed America: The Middle and Southern States, 1783 to 1837, by Fred J. Hood (University of Alabama Press). \$21.50.

The Rise and Fall of Slavery in America, by Louis Filler (Englewood, NJ: Jerome S. Ozer, Pub.). \$9.95.

Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern

Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873, by Jacqueline Jones (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press). \$17.50.

Southerners: A Journalist's Odyssey, by Marshall Frady (New York: New American Library). \$12.95.

"Soybeans as an Indicator of the Progress of Southern Agriculture Since the Second World War," by Bruce E. Parry. American University.

Stones River: Bloody Winter in Tennessee, by James L. McDonough (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press). \$14.50.

The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954 to 1980, by Harvard Sitkoff (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981). \$10.95.

"The Struggle for Dominance: Urban Rivalry in North Texas, 1870-1910," by Michael Quinley Hooks. Texas Tech University, 1979.

Texas Statehouse Blues, by Ben Sargent (Austin: Texas Monthly Press). \$5.95.

"That Fateful Class: Black Teachers of Virginia's Freedmen, 1861-1887," by Betty Mansfield. Catholic University of America.

"Urban Industry, Black Resistance and Racial Reconstruction in the Antebellum South: A General Model and Case Study in Urban Virginia," by Rodney Dale Green. American University.

"What Shall We Be? A Study of the Political Thought of Three Black Americans," by James Leon Holmes. Duke University.

White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History, by George M. Frederickson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981). \$19.95.

Working Lives: The "Southern Exposure" History of Labor in the South, ed. by Marc S. Miller (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981). \$7.95.

"Yeoman Regions in the Antebellum Deep South: Settlement and Economy in Northern Alabama, 1815-1860," by John Mitchell Allman, III. University of Maryland, 1979.

BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The Confessions of James Copeland, by J.R. Pitts (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi). \$7.95. Reprint of 1909 edition.

"David Caldwell: The Forming of a Southern Educator," by Mark Frances Miller. UNC-Chapel Hill, 1979.

Frances Warrington Dawson and the Politics of Restoration: South Carolina, 1874 to 1889, by E. Culpeper Clark (University: University of Alabama Press). \$18.95.

George C. Wallace and the Politics of Powerlessness, by Jody Carlson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books). \$22.95.

"A Rhetorical Study of Selected Ceremonial Speeches of Charles Betts Galloway, 1893-1908," by Charlene Jeannette Handford. Louisiana State University, 1979.

Wild Bill Sullivan: King of the Hollow, by Ann R. Hammonds (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi). \$12.50.

Young Frederick Douglass: The Maryland Years, by Dickson J. Preston (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press). \$15.00.

CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

"The American Baptist Home Mission Society and the South, 1832-1894," by Robert Andrew Baker. Yale University.

"An Analytical Study of Southern Religion of the 1970s as Based on Samuel S. Hill Jr.'s Southern Culture-Religion Thesis,"

by Gene McLean Adams. Florida State University.

The Arrival of B.B. King: The Authorized Biography, by Charles Sawyer (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co.). \$14.95.

Black Dance in the United States From 1619 to 1970, by Lynne F. Emery (Brooklyn: Dance Horizons). \$10.50.

Blacks in Blackface: A Sourcebook on Early Black Musical Shows, by Henry T. Sampson (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press). \$27.50.

The Charlotte Story, by Mary Kraft (Tulsa, OK: Continental Heritage Press). \$24.95.

Deep South: Memory and Observation, by Erskine Caldwell (Athens: University of Georgia Press). \$5.95.

"A Developmental History of the Wayland Hutcherson Flying Queens from 1910 to 1979," by Sylvia Faye Nadler. East Texas State University.

Drew's Blues: A Sideman's Life with the Big Bands, by Drew Page (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press). \$14.95.

"Early 18th Century French-Indian Culture Contact in the Yazoo Bluffs Region of the Lower Mississippi Valley," by Ian William Brown. Brown University, 1979.

"The Gospel Mission Movement Within the Southern Baptist Convention," by Adrian Larkin, Jr. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Hot Peppers: Cajuns and Capiscum in New Iberia, Louisiana, by Richard Schweid (Seattle: Madrona Pubs.). \$9.95.

"Human and Animal Imagery on Southern Creel and Shell Work, Southeastern United States, A.D. 1200 to 1350," by Lee Ann Wilson. Columbia University.

The Image of Progress: Alabama Photographs, 1872-1917, by Melton A. McLaurin and Michael V. Thompson (University: University of Alabama Press). \$19.95.

Just Folks: Conversations with Carolina People, by Jerry Bledsoe (Charlotte: Fust and McMillan Pubs.). \$9.95.

"Kinship and Residential Proximity: A Case Study of a Black Extended Family in New Orleans," by Lenus Jack, Jr. University of Pittsburgh.

Lost New Orleans, by Mary Cable (Boston: Houghton Mifflin). \$20.00.

Mountain Singer: The Life and Legacy of Byron Herbert Reece, by Raymond A. Cooke (Covington, GA: Cherokee Publishing Co.). \$12.50.

"Precocious Pregnancies: Patterns of Sexuality Among White Adolescent Women in the Rural South," by Kay Pamela Justman Fischer. University of Florida, 1979.

Prehistoric Indians of the Southeast: Archaeology of Alabama and the Middle South, by John A. Walthall (University: University of Alabama Press). \$22.50.

Readings in Creole Studies, by I.I. Hancock (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press). \$62.00.

Rhythm and Blues Records: An Encyclopedic Discography, 1943 to 1975, ed. by Cliff Martin and Frank Scott (Forest Grove, OR: Nighthawk Press). Price not set.

"The Role of the Church-Related Social Worker in the Southern Baptist Convention," by Bob Wayne Brackey. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979.

The South and North in American Religion, by Samuel S. Hill, Jr. (Athens: University of Georgia Press). \$12.50.

"Sport and Popular Pastimes in the Plantation Community: The Slave Experience," by David Kenneth Wiggins. University of Maryland, 1979.

Tom Ashley, Sam McGee, Bukka White:

Tennessee Traditional Singers, ed. by Thomas G. Burton (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press). \$14.50.

LITERATURE IN THE SOUTH

Charles Waddell Chesnut, by Sylvia L. Render (Boston: Twayne Pubs.). \$12.95.

"A Collection and Study of the Traditional Prose Narrative in Grady County, Georgia," by Mariella Hartsfield. Florida State University.

"A Collection of Plays and Poems By the Late Col. Robert Munford, of Mecklenberg County, in the State of Virginia: A Critical Edition," by Jon Charles Miller. UNC-Chapel Hill, 1979.

"Contrapuntal in Integration: A Study of Three Faulkner Short Story Volumes," by Lisa Olson Paddock. University of Toronto.

"From Moviegoing to Moviemaking: Rhetorical Progression in the Walker Percy Fictive Protagonist," by Timothy Lee Seiler. Indiana University.

Gwendolyn Brooks, by Harry B. Shaw (Boston: Twayne Pubs.). \$9.95.

"Heraclitean Idealism in the Plays of Paul Green," by Robert Edward Aldridge. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1979.

"The Hero's Journey in the Novels of Caroline Gordon," by Sandra M. Lavin. Louisiana State University, 1979.

"The Individual in the Family: A Critical Introduction to the Novels of Ann Tyler," by Stella Ann Nesanovich. Louisiana State University, 1979.

Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962, ed. by James B. Meriwether and Michael Milgate (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press). \$17.50.

"The Making of a Novelist: William Faulkner's Career to the Writing of *The Sound and the Fury*," by Martin Lewis Kreiswirth. University of Toronto, 1979.

"The Power of Mr. Compson in *Absalom, Absalom!*: Heroism/Homoeroticism/Approach-Avoidance Toward Women," by Marla Trissell Knudson. University of Southern California, 1978.

Richard Wright, by Robert Felgar (Boston: Twayne Pubs.). \$9.95.

"The Search for a Hero: A Literary Biography of Brainard Cheney, Southern Novelist, Reporter and Polemicist," by James Edwin Young, II. Peabody College, 1979.

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