

# SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

A JOURNAL OF POLITICS & CULTURE

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## Standing Out



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a new movement**



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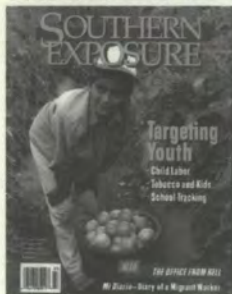
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**SOUTHERN EXPOSURE** has been published since 1973 by the Institute for Southern Studies. With its combination of investigative reporting, historical perspective, oral histories, photography, and literature, the magazine has earned a national reputation. The magazine has received several Project Censored Awards; the Sidney Hillman Award for courageous reporting on racial injustice; two Alternative Press Awards for best regional publication; a National Magazine Award; and the John Hancock Insurance Company award for economic reporting.

**THE INSTITUTE FOR SOUTHERN STUDIES** is a nonprofit center working for progressive change in the region. Since its founding in 1970, the Institute has sponsored research, education, and organizing programs to (1) empower grassroots organizations and communities with strong local leadership and well-informed strategies, (2) provide the information, ideas, and historical understanding of Southern social struggles necessary for long-term fundamental change, and (3) nourish communication, cooperation, and understanding among diverse cultural groups.

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**Cover photo by Keith Ernst**

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WINTER 1999/2000

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## From the Editor

**D**o you want to know my biggest fear about this issue? It's not that we'll get dismissed as too "radical," although it'll probably happen ("Is that the word *queer* on the cover?!"). It's not that we'll make Jesse Helms' blood boil, although that would be a feather in the cap of any justice-loving editor.

No, most disappointing – maybe even infuriating – would be if straight folks took a glance at the cover of this issue and decided, "This is the gay and lesbian issue – it's not for me."

Over the years, I'm not sure how many times I've listened to otherwise thoughtful people intone that gay and lesbian justice just isn't a "primary issue." It always takes a while for my mind to untangle itself from a pretzel of astonishment and outrage.

In the face of demagogues big and small who turn biblical verses into raving manifestos for bigotry; in the wake of Matthew Shepard's murder, only the tip of the homophobic violence iceberg; in the midst of the exclusion of millions of gay men, lesbians, and transgender people from jobs, housing, health benefits and other basic rights – such views are not only naïve, they're dangerous. And besides – through the history of humanity, what has been more important than the question of who we can and cannot love?

As this issue makes clear, today's Southern movement for gay, lesbian,

transgender and bisexual justice marks a turning point in the broader movement for change. This new movement is making connections, challenging entrenched power, and challenging what it means to love, exist, and struggle in this society. This movement is dismantling identity politics – not through the old route of denying identities, but by *connecting* them, with powerful results. This movement is today's realization of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, famous words in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Which brings us back to why this is everyone's struggle. Most of us have little stake in a society – or a social change movement – that seeks to define our humanity as narrowly as possible; that insists on elevating some and leaving others behind; that allows fear to throttle our instincts for solidarity and compassion.

As for this issue being too radical – Kim Diehl, my colleague and guest editor of this issue, explains the radical conditions that demand radical solutions when she eloquently explains why we use the word "queer" in her introductory piece (p. 25). It again calls to mind Martin's words, penned behind bars, directed at the liberal clergy who were dragging their feet in Alabama while labeling the freedom fighters of that era as "extremists."

"The question is not whether we will be extremist but what kind of extremist we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice – or will we be extremists for the cause of justice? Maybe the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists."

— Chris Kromm

*What's more important than the question of who we can and cannot love?*



## LITTLE "INJUSTICE" IN THE FIELDS

I would like to comment on the article that appeared in *Southern Exposure* magazine, "Uprooting Injustice." [Summer 1999], an article that was full of misinformation.

By leading the story with the unfortunate situation involving Carlos Fuentes, the tone was already set for the reader to assume all farmworkers were part of the H2A program. The article never made the distinction between "green card" workers and those of the H2A program. Of the 344,000 mostly Latinos, the NCGA only brings in a fraction of those.

Our workers are covered by Workers Compensation, a 3/4 work guarantee, transportation to and from Mexico when there services are completed, bilingual field and office staff, a toll free hotline, government inspected housing, and a guaranteed wage that has gone from \$6.16 an hour to \$6.54 an hour this year. This wage will increase to \$6.98 Feb. 15, 2000. This wage is also guaranteed when workers are doing piece-work jobs.

Every worker that comes through our door receives training in pesticide safety. Representatives from the Farmworker Health Alliance meet with our workers in Vass, NC and provide them with health care information. In short, the conditions described in the article hardly apply to H2A workers.

I would like to invite you to visit our offices at your convenience and we would gladly let you see our program first-hand. Incidentally, Carlos Fuentes' colleagues in the field contributed \$2000 dollars to send his family. We matched that and sent our field rep. to his home with this small token. Last year, eight farmworkers died in farming related accidents. These were not H2A workers, but the press never seems to point this out.

So, as you can see, we have quite an extensive network of services available to our farmworkers.

Michael Bell  
North Carolina Growers Association

## SOUTHERN EXPOSURE RESPONDS:

In a way, it is ironic that Mr. Bell of the N.C. Growers Association—the nation's largest user of H2A labor—argues that our account of Carmelo Fuentes, put in a coma by heat stroke in 1998 unfairly taints the Association and the H2A program. The fact is, Carmelo Fuentes was brought to North Carolina as an H2A worker, and his severe injury is a testament to the unsafe working conditions—and lax enforcement of safeguards—that H2A and non-H2A farmworkers routinely face.

To cite a recent example: in the weeks after Hurricane Floyd ravaged the eastern Carolinas, follow-up research found that some growers were insisting on paying "piece rate" even though most crops were destroyed—amounting to pay below the guaranteed H2A rate. Workers told Elon College professor Dr. Sandy Smith-Nonini that even after they held a work stoppage one morning and

called the Grower's Association to insist on being paid, the Association told them to "take what the farmer offers."

Unfortunately, such casual observance of H2A standards is not unheard of—indeed, our report found that dangerous and unjust conditions led farmworkers to flee one H2A grower's camp.

Perhaps the H2A program's use of standards does offer a precedent for improving conditions in the largely unregulated farm labor industry. As Mr. Bell correctly points out, over 325,000 farmworkers toil in North Carolina agriculture without even the bare bones standards arguably in place for H2A workers. In the future, the Institute hopes to better document the challenges facing these workers and the viability of enacting standards that elevate all farmworkers conditions.

But, the North Carolina Grower's Association, as a non-profit organization, has the obligation to invest resources to ensure that these basic standards set by the H2A program are being met.

Service organizations and farmworker groups must also be allowed to call attention to issues facing farmworkers. The N.C. Council of Churches and dozens of other non-profit organizations have called on the Association to remove a controversial clause from their program that growers use to deny farmworkers the unfettered right to visitors—and to stymie the independent monitoring and enforcement of H2A program standards. Acting now to remove this "no tenancy" clause would help demonstrate the Association's desire to see H2A standards upheld.

Keith Ernst and Chris Kromm

*Keith Ernst is a Research Director at the Institute for Southern Studies, and co-founder of the Institute's Farmworker Justice Project. Chris Kromm is editor of Southern Exposure.*

For more information about the H2A program and other farmworker issues, readers may contact Lela Klein at the Farmworker Justice Project, (919) 419-8311 x25 and fwjustice@i4south.org, or order the Institute report, "Uprooting Injustice" by sending \$5 to ISS Reports, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.

*Give Your Thoughts*

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# SONG

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*The work of SONG is based on the following beliefs:*

We are all part of one another.

Race, class, gender and sexual orientation are intrinsically connected.

Race is central to oppression in the US, and we are committed to anti-racism in all we do.

"Divide and conquer" keeps people from joining together. Our hope for change is bringing people together in multi-issue, multi-cultural organizing.

Everyone should be able to bring their full selves to this work for change.

People of color, women and working class people should be central to the work of lgbt groups.

Attacks on lesbian, gay, trans people threaten the entire social justice agenda.

Our work is about transformation to a just and fair society.

*For additional information, please contact our co-directors:*

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# The nation's preeminent Southern historian was a rebel, but civil

**C. Vann Woodward**, who died in December at the age of 91, was this century's preeminent historian of the South. No other scholar, teacher, or writer more powerfully shaped our understanding of the region's past or its complex legacies for the nation as a whole. And it was not because he avoided controversy.

Woodward was a rebel. He entered the doctoral program at Chapel Hill in the 1930s after being dismissed from a faculty position at Georgia Tech for political reasons, chief among them having chaired the defense committee for African-American communist Angelo Herndon. But the din of controversy was by no means left behind in Atlanta. Woodward stirred it, politically and professionally, wherever he went.

Indeed, the greatness of his work in good part derived from its irreverent quality. His seminal books – the brilliant biography of Georgia Populist leader *Tom Watson* (1938); the immensely ambitious reassessment of the post-Reconstruction era, *Origins of the New South* (1951); and the pioneering study of race relations and the rise of segregation, regarded by Martin Luther King as the “historical Bible of the civil rights movement,” *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955) – challenged not only the orthodoxies and shibboleths of the South, but also the conventions and assumptions of his fellow historians.

Woodward wrote of change at a time when most historians emphasized stability and continuity. He identified conflict at a time when most historians touted consensus. He considered the political struggles of the poor and disadvantaged with seriousness and compassion at a time when most historians treated them with puzzlement and suspicion.

He asked us to ponder the painful legacies of war, compromise, and



C. VANN WOODWARD

repression at a time when most historians celebrated the genius of American politics. In so doing, he utterly transformed the ways in which Southern and American history were viewed.

Woodward continued to stir the scholarly waters and imagination with *The Burden of Southern History* (1960), *The Comparative Approach to American History* (1968), and *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* (1971). He then took on the task of editing the authoritative edition of Mary Boykin Chestnut's Civil War diaries, *Mary Chestnut's Civil War* (1981), for which he won the Pulitzer Prize. More recently, he collected many of his essays and reflections on history and literature in *Thinking Back: The Perils of Writing History* (1986), and *The Future of the Past* (1989).

But Woodward made it his business to keep stirring the political waters, too. He helped prepare the successful brief that eventuated in the Supreme Court's monumental *Brown* decision of 1954. He joined the march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965. And he gave congressional testimony to support extension of the Voting Rights Act. Throughout, he lent his voice to the causes of intellectual integrity, the open exchange of

ideas, interracial cooperation, and civil conduct – even when it invited criticism and disappointment from some on the political left.

There were few institutions that Woodward defended more resolutely and consistently than the university, where he spent most of his working life. He taught briefly at the University of Florida, the University of Virginia, and at Scripps College in California before moving to Johns Hopkins for an extended stay.

Then, in 1962, he became the Sterling Professor of History at Yale University, where he remained until his retirement. In the process, he trained innumerable graduate students and supervised nearly fifty doctoral dissertations, many of which became signal works in their own right. All along, he lectured widely in this country and abroad, and received most every distinction the intellectual and academic worlds have to offer.

Woodward's ideas have been the starting point for virtually every important study of the post-Civil War South written during the past half century. The ideas have been adopted, incorporated, developed, and – most fittingly – challenged. There have been challenges from the left, from the right, and from the center.

Some of the challenges have come from his own students. He explained this trend, rather playfully, as a manifestation of what he called “gerontophagy”: the penchant of the young to devour their elders.

C. Vann Woodward was never devoured.

SE

— Steven Hahn

Steven Hahn is a Professor of History at Northwestern University, and a former student of C. Vann Woodward. We thank him for this remembrance of Woodward, who once had the kindness to say of *Southern Exposure*, “I only wish my generation had started such a stimulating magazine.”

## Making a Movement in Miami

*The Miami Workers Center fights from the bottom up*



**GIHAN PERERA CO-FOUNDED THE INSTITUTE-SPONSORED MIAMI WORKERS CENTER**

*The Institute for Southern Studies – publisher of Southern Exposure – sponsors a variety of education, media and organizing projects working for progressive change in the region. In the following dispatch, Gihan Perera, co-founder with Sheila O’Farrell of the Institute-sponsored Miami Workers Center, talks about the Center’s prospects and progress in building “a genuine worker’s movement” in the city.*

**T**he Miami Workers Center arose out of the dire need to organize against the growing super-exploitation of low-income workers and to develop the capacity of workers to lead the movement for change themselves. The Miami Workers Center is a workers’ organization that tries to address the root causes of injustice through grassroots organizing and political education. Through our experiences, we have recognized that we must build upon a much broader vision and incorporate new forms of organization than exist in the traditional labor movement.

The Center is a playing the central role in organizing, guiding, and helping to build a welfare rights organization in Miami. We began by doing research, analysis, and neigh-

borhood-based surveying of close to two hundred welfare recipients who were being put through WAGES (Florida’s welfare reform program). The results of the surveys were overwhelmingly critical of the WAGES program, and the vast majority of respondents expressed interest in organizing.

We then organized a mass meeting in the local community center, and we had a tremendous turnout. The tone was that of a religious revival. The core leaders have formed a steering committee and came up with a name for their organization, Minority Families Fighting Against WAGES (MFFAW).

All of our ground-level organizing is concentrated in Liberty City, the African-American heart of Miami. Liberty City has the highest concentration of welfare recipients in the county as well as one of the highest unemployment rates.

Needless to say, welfare reform is having a particularly devastating effect here. Ninety percent of the recipients are women with children, and in this area all are African-American. Miami has just moved to being the fourth poorest city in the country, and we attribute much of this move directly to the failures of welfare reform.

However, the systematic exploitation and oppression that we face in Miami did not begin with welfare reform. In fact, the effects of welfare reform are so bad here precisely because of the long-standing political power wielded by the divergent elite. Florida’s statewide politics are definitively Southern in their conservatism, and Miami’s local politics have been influenced greatly by leaders of extreme right-wing exile groups from Latin America. This combination has resulted in a thwarting of progressive politics.

Miami is a relatively young city, with the highest concentration of first-generation immigrants in the country. Even much of the African-American population emigrated from other Southern communities.

The key characteristics of these demographics have been division, a general absence of progressive political leadership and a severe lack of established institutions which fight for working-class interests either politically, socially, or culturally. The result has been increased exploitation for all.

The Center’s long-term goal is to contribute to the birth of a genuine workers movement in this city that will transform the present power relations. The severe exploitation, the low level of working-class consciousness, and the lack of a working-class agenda – all point to the dire need of the Center. The Center will seek to bring unity where there is now division, to help build leadership and power where there is now cynicism and powerlessness, and to help workers concretely win by building their own fighting organizations.

*For more information, contact [miamiproject@hotmail.com](mailto:miamiproject@hotmail.com)*

**PROJECT  
CENSORED**

### “Toxic Gumbo” Wins Award

*One of “Top 10 Censored Stories”*

**S**outhern Exposure investigative editor Ron Nixon has been honored by Project Censored, a California-based media watchdog group, for writing one of the “Top Ten Censored Stories of 1999.” Ron garnered the award for “Toxic



Gumbo," a story from the Fall 1998 issue of *SE* which highlighted the battle between citizens and Shintech, among other chemical companies, in the infamous "cancer alley" near Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Each year, the Project Censored awards go to important stories that don't get enough coverage in mainstream media. Congratulations, Ron!

## Creating a Grassroots/Policy Connection

*The NC Multi-Issue Alliance*

**W**ouldn't it be a great idea to have non-profit research organizations partner with nonprofit advocacy, grassroots organizing, and social justice organizations, for the purpose of creating a powerful, progressive voice for the poor and underserved of North Carolina?

Well, it is not just an idea it is reality. The Institute for Southern Studies, along with seven other statewide nonprofits, have partnered to create the NC Multi-Issue Alliance. The Alliance is a permanent collaboration between the Institute, NC Fair Share, Southerners for Economic Justice, the NC Council of Churches, NC Equity, the NC Justice and Community Development Center, the Common Sense Foundation, and the NC Association of Community Development Corporations.

These partners will work together to ensure that disadvantaged people and the community-based organizations that represent them are heard in the political and economic process in order to achieve an equitable system that provides adequate resources for jobs, education health

care and other services.

For the year 2000 and beyond, the NC Multi-Issue Alliance plans to coordinate and conduct timely state and community-level policy analysis centered around the issues raised by welfare reform. Through the networks of each partner organization, the Alliance will communicate and translate such analysis to state and local activist groups, the media, local policy-makers, and the public at large. The analysis will be used further to engage low-income communities and ensure their full participation in policy debates at the state and community level.

*For more information about the NC Multi-Issue Alliance and its upcoming activities, contact Alliance Coordinator David Baker at (919) 856-2154.*

## A Historic Medal

**T**his past September, Dr. Jacquelyn Hall received the National

Humanities Medal from President Clinton. Hall was honored for her work as founder and director of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, calling attention to her pioneering efforts to put ordinary people at the center of history.

Dr. Hall was also an early contributor and editor of *Southern Exposure* magazine, where she published ground-breaking oral histories, as well as compelling analyses on Southern subjects ranging from labor organizing to women and lynching.

We'd like to say "congratulations!" to Jackie – and to the Southern Oral History Program for 25 years of enriching our understanding of the everyday people that comprise the South.



## UPROOTING INJUSTICE

**A Report on Working Conditions for North Carolina Farmworkers and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee's Mt. Olive Initiative**



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## George W. Bush Whistles Dixie

*The GOP Presidential front-runner has a little-known past of supporting groups that glorify the Confederacy*



**TEXAS** – Texas Governor George W. Bush may be leader of the second-biggest state in the union, and the Republican nominee for the 2000 Presidential race – but the image he wants voters to see is that he’s just a good ol’ boy. The media calls him “plain spoken” and “congenial,” while pundits celebrate his down-home charm.

But for others, being a “good ol’ boy” can have more sinister implications, conjuring up images of powerful white folks with a nostalgic longing for a time before movements for racial justice upset the Southern order.

Evidence is mounting that this more unseemly side to the South is also part of Gov. Bush’s history. While he maintains silence on the issue of the

Confederate flag flying over South Carolina’s statehouse, documents made available to *Southern Exposure* reveal that Gov. Bush has a long-standing close relationship with – and offers financial support to – far-right neo-Confederate groups and causes. Among the evidence:

▲ The Virginia-based Museum of the Confederacy lists Gov. Bush in its 1997-1998 Annual Report as a donor to its annual ball – a gathering held in a slave hall that celebrates the days of the Southern Confederacy.

▲ A letter on Texas Governor stationery, dated January 1, 1996, features Gov. Bush congratulating the United Daughters of the Confederacy on their

100<sup>th</sup> anniversary – a group known for glorifying the Confederate past, and which has gained infamy for sponsoring books by extreme-right authors who downplay the horrors of the slave trade.

▲ Bush also penned an official state letter honoring the Sons of Confederate Veterans in 1996, a group which claims to be mainstream, but which has offered a platform for avowedly white supremacist organizations like the Council of Conservative Citizens.

Most controversial is Bush’s support for the Museum of the Confederacy’s annual ball – held at the Tredgar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia,

where slaves worked to build war material for the Confederate Army. Each year the ball attracts hundreds of all-white guests in period costume in a hall festooned with Confederate flags.

In 1996, the ball drew “astonishment and outrage” from black leaders in the city of Richmond, which is 55% African-American, according to *The New York Times*. “Backers of the ball said their intentions were innocent and honorable [and] designed not to celebrate the era of slavery but to tell the story,” the *Times* reported.

But detractors note the Museum and the ball show clear sympathy for the Confederate cause. The title of the 1996

## Say it Loud, He’s Old and I’m Proud

**COLUMBIA, S.C.** – When asked by *Rolling Stone* magazine to name a hero of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Godfather of Soul cited Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.). James Brown’s tribute is remarkable since the 97-year-old Thurmond ran for president in 1948 as a Dixiecrat to oppose desegregation. “Senator Thurmond has been able to stay afloat all these years, and he’s great for our country,” the African-American soul singer said. “When the young whippersnappers get out of line, whether Democrat or Republican, an old man can walk up and say, ‘Wait a minute son, it goes this way.’ And that’s great for our country. He’s like a grandfather to me.” Thurmond’s response? “James is very generous with his comments.”



**SEN. STROM THURMOND:**  
“GREAT FOR OUR COUNTRY?”

Illustration by Van Howell

event, "Bonnie Blue Ball," was an open celebration of the Bonnie Blue flag, the flag of secession of the Confederacy.

Critics also point to the Museum's selling of far-right literature, and the appointment of leading neo-Confederate ideologue Ludwell Johnson as a Museum Fellow in 1993 — author of "Is the Confederacy Obsolete?" and other calls for a revival of the old Southern system.

Bush's listing as a "Donor to Fund Raising Events" in the Museum's Annual Report was briefly publicized on the New York-based radio show Democracy Now last November. The Museum clarified that Bush did not actually give money, but that he did write a fundraising letter to garner funds for the ball.

Bush also defends his support of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) and the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) — by arguing that the groups are dedicated to heritage, not hate. Gov. Bush was one of several political figures — including President Clinton and a handful of state Democratic and Republican leaders — who have written to congratulate the two organizations.

But both groups have also drawn controversy, with many scholars and community leaders charging that the "heritage not hate" slogan obscures the groups' true motives. Dr. James McPherson, a leading

## I'll be Home (in a Sweatshop) for Christmas

**BLACKSBURG, Va.** — The tune of "Hark, The Herald Angels Sing" sounded familiar. But the words wafting through downtown Blacksburg this holiday season were new:

*A quarter-an-hour in Honduras,  
Just five cents in Bangladesh.  
Seven-day weeks in Guatemala,  
Indonesians earn ten cents!  
Workers beaten for mistakes,  
Wal-Mart this is your disgrace.  
Tell us where your factories are!  
Do they exploit the planet's poor?  
Hark, to Wal-Mart, we do say,  
People deserve a living wage!*

So went one of a group of several "Sweatshop Carols," sang by 50 activists in Blacksburg as part of the third annual Holiday Season of Conscience to End Child Labor and Sweatshop Abuses. The campaign, sponsored by the National Labor Committee and the People of Faith Network in 32 communities across the country, drew attention to the sweatshop labor behind many holiday gifts — and the resistance of companies like Wal-Mart to disclose where their products are made.

"When you buy a dress or shirt, you almost never know whether it was made in a sweatshop," said Dale Wimberly, a sociology professor at nearby Virginia Tech. "The first step we must take is to find out exactly where these factories are, so the workers themselves can tell us about their pay and conditions."

Civil War historian at Princeton University, argues there is a "hidden agenda — not too deeply hidden" of racism promoted by the UDC and SCV.

Among the evidence are articles in the groups' publications, which feature the works of extremists such as Michael Andrew Grissom — a mem-

ber of the infamous Council of Conservative Citizens, who praises the KKK and a lynching in Oklahoma as the product of "small-town virtues" — and Dr. Walter Lee, who contended in *UDC Magazine* that "slaves did not always resent their captivity," among other claims that the African slave trade wasn't as bad

as usually thought.

"[These groups] are dedicated to celebrating the Confederacy and rather thinly veiled support for white supremacy," McPherson ads.

— Chris Kromm  
Ed Sebesta provided research for this story.

*People deserve a living wage!*



The protests came on the heels of findings by the National Labor Committee that, in El Salvador's Caribbean Apparel factory — a maker of Kathie Lee label garments, sold at Wal-Mart — workers were forced to work 11-hour shifts six days a week, and were paid 60 cents an hour, roughly 15 cents for every \$17 pair of Kathie Lee pants they sewed. A union organizer working with Caribbean Apparel employees received death threats and was told he could be killed for \$12.50.

Wal-Mart has so far refused to disclose its contractors' factory locations, saying it would give advantages to competitors. Dr. Wimberly told the assembled protestors — sporting signs such as "Ebenezer Scrooge ran a sweatshop!" — that most competitors already know where products are manufactured, leaving only the public in the dark.

Source: *New River Free Press*

## North Carolina Activists Apply Labor Solidarity to Flood Relief

**ROCKY MOUNT, N.C. —**

"We give solidarity during a strike; a disaster is also that time," says Ajamu Dillahunt of Black Workers For Justice (BWFJ), a workers' center based in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. "We wanted to demonstrate solidarity between workers."

Dillahunt's union, the Raleigh local of the American Postal Workers Union, collected food and clothing for those devastated by Hurricane Floyd and caravanned 50 miles to deliver the aid. The APWU is part of the Workers and Communities Aid and Relief Project (WACARP), a coalition initiated by the Black Workers for Justice.

The group's slogan is "social justice, not charity." Its aim is to help those wiped out by Floyd to organize themselves to fight for power in the relief effort.

"We feel it's a human right and a democratic right," said Saladin Muhammad of BWFJ, "to have access to resources with dignity during times of disaster, as opposed to making people feel like they're hustlers or criminals or beggars."

"It's so people don't feel like just victims, helpless, waiting for someone to come and

save them," said Dillahunt. "They don't exactly have their hands on the levers of power in the relief effort, but at least they can make some demands on the relief agencies FEMA [the Federal Emergency Management Agency] and the Red Cross.

FEMA says that 7,890 homes in the area suffered minor damage, 4,282 suffered major damage, and 3,680 were completely destroyed. Forty-eight people are dead and five are missing, presumed dead. Much of the relief effort is focused on the town of Princeville, said to be the oldest incorporated black town in the South. Formerly a plantation, Princeville was

founded by freed slaves after the Civil War and incorporated in 1885.

Today, Princeville is no more. Houses, stores, the funeral home — all were swept away. "Put it in one word, it's devastated," said Ida Boddie, who lives nearby and is working at the WACARP relief center. "That whole little Black town was drowned out. Some people drowned; some they haven't found yet. Some people lost their homes, their cars, and their jobs."

From other parts of the country, organizations such as churches and students at historic black colleges are taking up the Princeville cause. "It's a question of political power, especially when people get

dispersed," explains Muhammad. It's common in North Carolina, he says, for town boundaries to be gerrymandered to create a white majority, even if the area as a whole is sixty-five percent African American. If Princeville residents are scattered to the four winds, they lose whatever small amount of political clout their town once had.

The situation is worsened by speculators who are offering to buy people's land at a time when they are in desperate need for money.

WACARP's goal is to allow the affected people to assess their own needs for reconstruction and have democratic input into shaping how local,

## Short-Changing Schools

Southern states ranked near the bottom in per-student funding for schools during the 1998-1999 school year, according to a recent study by the National Education Association. However, the South's low marks were part of an overall decline in expenditures per student across the country — the first such decline in the 57-year history of the report.

The report argues that school funding is not keeping up with increased enrollment, and that teacher salaries aren't in line with rising wages in other professional jobs.

How the states ranked in per-student spending:



Source: National Education Association, 1999



county, and federal government agencies organize recovery. "Don't confuse relief and recovery," says Muhammad.

He describes an area 20 miles from Princeville where people are being housed in 500 6' x 15' trailers, usually four or five people to a trailer, but up to eight. The camp uses Porta-johns, and is considered a step up from the shelters where many people are still living. Most people housed in trailers come from Princeville and from East Tarboro, a black section of town next to Princeville. Most whites (and some blacks) are sent to motels. "You could tolerate each other for a week, going camping, but not for 18 months," says Muhammad.

Some Princeville residents had been able to survive on the low wages prevalent in the area – often around \$6 an hour – only because they were living in paid-off houses left to them by their parents. No relief grant will be enough to buy another house. "The government response makes them more vulnerable to specu-

lators," Muhammad points out.

Government aid thus far looks meager and slow. "We want to make sure people in certain areas are targeted that may be left out," says Dillahunt.

Just as catastrophic for people's lives as loss of their homes is loss of their jobs. The Merita Bakery, for example, with 600 to 800 workers, is to be closed for six months to a year. There is no guarantee that flood-damaged businesses will reopen at all. Nineteen thousand people in the state have applied for emergency unemployment benefits.

Muhammad describes a company called Vermont-American in Greenville, which was shut down for two and a half weeks. Management offered loans to workers – but said they would have to be paid back by workers putting in seven-day weeks, with one day unpaid. Workers refused to sign and the company compromised. "Thirty-eight people lost their homes," said Muhammad. "They're saying, 'We can't work seven days.'"

At WACARP's relief center, the group seeks to organize and train neighborhood relief committees to do community needs assessments, aid distribution, and community education; to organize a transportation pool; to organize food and clothing collections at workplaces; to set up an information hotline; and put out a relief information bulletin.

—Jane Slaughter

*Tax-deductible donations can be sent to the Workers and Communities Aid and Relief Project, c/o N.C. Rural Health Coalition, PO Box 92218, Durham, NC 27708.*

## Life Savers

**North Carolina county first in U.S. to call for halt on executions**

**HILLSBOROUGH, N.C.** – In the small town of Hillsborough, N.C., commissioners for Orange County made history last November, voting unanimously to become the first county in the nation to call for a moratorium on executions.

The resolution, passed last November 3, cites wrongful convictions for capital crimes, as well as the unfair application of the death penalty, as reasons for the moratorium call. It goes on to state that "further discussion and deliberation of this contentious issue ... is merited

and the needed," and that the state should "expeditiously" review the use of the death penalty "due to the fact that approximately 197 person in North Carolina are awaiting execution."

Passage of the resolution was requested by leaders of People of Faith Against the Death Penalty, a statewide group based in Orange County, that has been pushing for passage of a moratorium law in the state's legislature.

"I'm impressed with the courage of people in elected office to take hard positions that will be unpopular with some folks," said the Rev. Diane Corlett, president of PFADP, after the vote.

The county's decision came after a summer when one N.C. death row prisoner, Charles Munsey, had his conviction and death sentence overturned because of overwhelming evidence of his innocence and false conviction.

Also last summer, another death row inmate, Steven Mark Bishop, heard the assistant district attorney who prosecuted him tell a judge that he "just plain forgot" about a credible witness that would have provided an alibi in his murder trial; the judge is considering ordering a new trial.

Last summer, the towns of Carrboro and Chapel Hill, also located in Orange County, and nearby Durham passed moratorium resolutions, setting the stage for the nation's first county-wide vote,

# Taking Care of Business

## Corporate Welfare Around the South

### What's Your Share?

\$48.8 billion dollars a year. While elected officials complain about tight budgets, that's how much taxpayers in this country spend every year to subsidize corporations through federal, state and local tax breaks and other "incentives," according to Kenneth Thomas, a University of Missouri at St. Louis political scientist who studies European and U.S. subsidies. According to Thomas, that comes to \$175 a year for every man, woman and child in the United States.



maker Nucor announced plans this year to shut down one of its plants and eliminate 114 jobs.

▲  
B.F. Goodrich Co. got tax breaks and free training for workers in late 1998 to create 200 to 300 jobs for a new aviation plant in Arkadelphia – but announced a month later it was closing down two other Arkansas plants, putting 545 people out of work and moving jobs to Alabama, Texas and California.

▲  
In addition to presenting evidence that budget-busting incentives rarely create jobs – they merely “shuffle them around” – Francis also presents a disturbing picture of a state that does little to measure the success of the costly incentive strategy. As Francis begins his Dec. 12 story, “If Arkansas taxpayers want to know if state tax breaks and government incentives for private businesses are paying off, they shouldn’t ask state officials. They don’t know either.”

### Workers Pull Plug on Subsidies for Titan Tire

Last July, employees at Titan Tire Company in Natchez, Mississippi, made an argument the town’s politicians couldn’t argue with: If Titan was going to receive tax breaks from the community, shouldn’t the tire giant give fair treatment to workers from the community? Members of USWA Local 303L – who have been locked in a year-long battle with Titan – convinced the City of Natchez

Board of Aldermen to rescind tax abatements the board had earlier granted Titan Tire for new equipment. The suspension, which came after 70 striking workers testified at the meeting, will last until the company agrees to a collective bargaining agreement with the union. “We [told] the city they shouldn’t give tax breaks to companies that wage war on their citizens,” said Local 303L president, Leo “T-Bone” Bradley. “Responsible corporations may deserve help, but not corporate outlaws.”

### Fighting Kentucky’s Low Road to Development

Citizens concerned about high-cost business giveaways in the bluegrass state now have a wonderful resource in Democracy Resource Center’s 44-page report, “Kentucky’s Low Road to Economic Development: What Corporate Subsidies are Doing to the Commonwealth.” The stories they tell will resonate with people in all states across the region and country: Citizens being locked out of decision-making. High-price-tag deals given to companies paying poverty wages, laying off workers, and in some cases – like timber companies – undercutting the public’s resources. Complete with case studies and steps for how people can make a difference. For copies contact the Center at 253 Regency Circle, Suite A, Lexington, KY 40503; (606) 276-0563; <[www.kydrc.org](http://www.kydrc.org)>.

*Taking Care of Business is an occasional column in Southern Exposure. To report news about business giveaways in your area, or how community-minded people are working for reform, write to Taking Care of Business, Southern Exposure, PO Box 531, Durham, NC 27702 or <[se@i4south.org](mailto:se@i4south.org)>.*

### Arkansas Paper Blasts Multi-Million Dollar Deals

Prompted by exposés in the independent press and national publications like *Time*, more and more local papers are investigating business giveaway deals.

An excellent example is Theo Francis’ two-part expose in the Dec. 12 and 19, 1999, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, where Francis offers a string of case-studies that detail the failure of multi-million dollar “recruitment packages” to create meaningful economic development.

Among the horror stories of corporations who received tax breaks and other incentives, and then abandoned the community they were supposed to benefit:

▲  
Smoky Hollow Foods, a subsidiary of Sara Lee Corp., cashed in \$400,000 worth of tax credits from 1996-98 – only to shut down its Little Rock smokehouse this summer, eliminating 495 employees to move the factory to Tupelo, Miss., built with the help of Mississippi subsidies.

▲  
After receiving \$11.6 million in tax breaks from 1996 to 1998, steel-

## Fighting for Teacher's Rights to Have No Rights

The September 13, 1999, issue of *Insight Magazine* reports that a growing number of teachers – claiming a suspicion of unions – are leaving the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, to join the American Association of Educators (AAE). The AAE boasts 17,000 members and bills itself as “a genuine alternative to the ‘union mentality.’” Its program? The California-based group “opposes teachers strikes, work slowdowns, compulsory union membership and collective bargaining,” while steadfastly supporting “the right to work.” The AAE has affiliates in seven states: Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania.

## Turning Tragedy into Hope

*Greensboro Justice Fund aids groups on the front lines and carries forward spirit of a Southern movement*

**GREENSBORO, N.C.** – For civil rights and other activists in the Piedmont city of Greensboro, the first weekend of this past November was a somber time. Hundreds had gathered from across the state and country to honor and reflect on the memory of the Greensboro Five – militant activists who were killed by the Ku Klux Klan on November 3, 1979.

But for members of the Greensboro Justice Fund – a grassroots foundation started by survivors of the massacre, and the group sponsoring the commemoration – the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary was also a time to talk about the future.

On November 5 and 6, the Fund gathered 12 community-based groups they

support from across the South to share lessons, discuss strategy, and, in the

the \$350,000 award paid by the City of Greensboro to survivor Marty Nathan – whose husband was killed in the massacre – in a suit brought against the City and the Klan and Nazis involved in the murder. Today, the Fund is largely supported by a loyal base of individual supporters.

“The Greensboro Justice Fund was the first foundation to give us any support,” says Ron Davis, a leader of Citizens for Police Review (CPR) in Knoxville, Tenn. “And unlike other foundations, we can say and do exactly what we think we need to do – without jumping through

*Photo courtesy of Greensboro Justice Fund*



**REV. NELSON JOHNSON — A SURVIVOR OF THE 1979 KLAN SHOOTINGS — HAS STAYED ACTIVE IN THE GREENSBORO COMMUNITY.**

words of Fund board member Rosalyn Pelles, “continue in [the 1979 activists’] spirit to build a Southern movement.”

Since 1985, the Fund has given out \$200,000 in small grants to over 50 scrappy, cutting-edge organizations working to “address the root causes of economic and social injustice.” The Fund was launched using

lots of hoops.”

Monroe Gilmour agrees. He’s an organizer for Western North Carolina Citizens for an End to Institutional Bigotry in Asheville, N.C. While small in numbers, the group has waged a high-profile battle against racist mascots, discrimination at area institutions, and the presence of hate groups in the mountains.

The group received national media attention last year, when they challenged a local school’s mascot that Native American leaders decried as racist – including calling the female athletes “squaws” and the presence of Indian lawn jockeys. The struggle was captured on CNN and led the Justice Department to open an investigation – the first in the nation – to determine whether stereotyped racial mascots create a “hostile racial atmosphere.”

“For a lot of us little groups, the [Fund’s] grants are significant money,” Gilmour says. “The Fund is right in synch with us to the core – they aren’t skittish about supporting groups that are really taking on the powers that be.”

Activists at the gathering also point to the November gathering as an example of the Fund’s commitment to spurring a broader movement.

“There’s so much value to bringing people together who work at the community level,” Davis says. “Seeing other people who are putting life and limb in jeopardy – it’s the only way to get a different definition of reality, and that’s what democracy is all about.”

“This is the main legacy of the Greensboro massacre – continuing the work of five people who were organizers,” Rosalyn Pelles says. “It’s more than a commemoration. We’re trying to build a movement for justice in the South.”

— Chris Kromm

## Hardened Criminals

JACKSON, Miss. – In early February, the *Jackson Progressive* bestowed the dubious honor of “idiotic bill of the week” on a Republican state senator seeking to outlaw men from becoming sexually aroused in public.

The “hands-down winner” for the week of February 2<sup>nd</sup> went to Thomas E. King, Jr., of Hattiesburg for his SB2013, “An Act to Prohibit Certain Indecent Acts; To Enact Definitions; To Prescribe Punishment for Violations; And For Related Purposes.” According to the bill, the measure would criminalize “the showing of covered male genitals in a discernibly turgid state.”

The *Progressive’s* dishonorable distinction is given weekly to “the legislator who files or promotes a piece of legislation that no reasonable person would seriously consider.”



Source: *The Jackson Progressive*

## Mercury Falling

*Eating fish may be hazardous to your health. Will the EPA regulate the companies behind mercury poisoning?*

SOUTH CAROLINA – Renee Suber goes to the Rosewood boat landing three times a week to fish for catfish and brim in the Congaree River. “I catch about 10 fish a week,” Suber says. But despite her many years of fishing out of the Congaree, she’s never heard of the state’s fish consumption advisory, which warns that mercury levels are at potentially dangerous levels.

William Bailey works at Pal’s Tackle in Kingstree, South Carolina. Although he sells gear to fishermen who frequent the Black

River – a river registering among the highest levels of mercury contamination in South Carolina – he says it’s not a subject of discussion for local fishers.

“I haven’t heard anyone talk about it,” Bailey says.

These stories – reported Alex Todorovic in a recent edition of the Columbia, S.C.-based *Free Times* – are part of an alarming nationwide trend. While fears of a mercury poisoning epidemic have led 40 states to issue warnings against eating bass, trout, and other fish from thousands of lakes and streams, mercury may still be a silent killer.

A study released last November by three environmental watchdog groups has found that coal-burning power plants – the top source of mercury pollution – pump over 98,000 pounds of mercury into the air each year. Another 100,000 pounds make their way into the environment through waste and coal cleaning.

Scientists rate mercury as one of the most deadly of poisons; the International Chemical Safety Program of the United Nations claims the heavy metal is one of the six biggest pollution threats world-wide.

The pollutant is considered a particular health threat to infants and young children, due to the damage mercury may cause to the development of vision, coordination, and other nervous system functions.

The study – published by the Environmental Working Group, the Clean Air Network, and the National Resources Defense Council – analyzed records from over 1,200 power plants nation-wide. Among the report’s findings:

- Half of all mercury pollution from power plants comes from eight states: Pennsylvania, Texas, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Alabama, West Virginia, and Kentucky (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Half of all mercury pollution from power plants comes from eight states: Pennsylvania, Texas, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Alabama, West Virginia and Kentucky.**

Rank	State	Estimated Power Plant Mercury Released In Waste 1998 (Pounds)	Estimated Power Plant Mercury Air Pollution 1998 (Pounds)	Estimated Total Release of Mercury into the Environment 1998 (Pounds)
1	Pennsylvania	7,778	9,967	17,745
2	Texas	10,982	9,072	20,054
3	Ohio	7,275	7,881	15,156
4	Illinois	3,338	6,252	9,590
5	Indiana	4,711	5,229	9,940
6	Alabama	2,020	4,876	6,896
7	West Virginia	4,411	4,751	9,161
8	Kentucky	3,320	3,855	7,175
9	North Carolina	1,506	2,870	4,376
10	Michigan	1,904	2,765	4,669

Source: Environmental Working Group, 1999. Compiled from EPA and DOE data.



• Six utilities – The Southern Company, American Electric Power, GPU, Edison International, Tennessee Valley Authority, and Texas Utilities Company – accounted for 30 percent of all mercury pollution from power plants in 1998. Each of these companies spewed more than 3,000 pounds of mercury directly into the air.

• Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) documents show that over seven million women and children are regularly eating mercury-contaminated fish above the level the agency considers safe.

“Coal-burning power plants pollute with impu-

**Table 2. Ten utility companies polluted the air with more than 2,000 pounds of mercury in 1998.**

Rank	Company	Estimated Power Plant Mercury Released In Waste 1998 (Pounds)	Estimated Power Plant Mercury Air Pollution 1998 (Pounds)	Estimated Total Release of Mercury into the Environment 1998 (Pounds)
1	Southern Company, The	3,830	7,523	11,353
2	American Electric Power Co., Inc.	6,654	6,858	13,511
3	GPU, Inc.	4,203	5,581	9,785
4	Edison International	2,188	4,324	6,512
5	Tennessee Valley Authority	3,425	4,109	7,535
6	Texas Utilities Company	5,420	3,288	8,708
7	FirstEnergy Corp	2,720	3,183	5,903
8	Dominion Resources, Inc.	2,022	2,657	4,679
9	Cinergy Corporation	2,312	2,438	4,750
10	Houston Industries Incorporated	1,894	2,235	4,130

Source: Environmental Working Group. Compiled from EPA and DOE data.

nity thanks to special treatment from politicians and bureaucrats,” the report’s authors argue.

In 1990 – under pres-

sure from utilities – Congress prohibited the OPA from regulating mercury until the agency completed a report of the pollutant’s health threats. When it finished the report in 1998, documenting widespread health threats, Congress extended the prohibition until more studies were completed by the National Academy of Sciences.

Meanwhile, in 1999, the EPA proposed to exempt coal combustion waste from hazardous waste regulations – giving the green light for more than 100 million tons of mercury-laden waste to be dumped with impunity from federal health and safety rules.

The report calls in the EPA to impose “stringent” emission limits on coal-fired plants; regulating coal-fired waste as it does other hazardous waste; and reducing our reliance on coal through conservation and using alternative energy sources.

## Contributors to Roundup

**Chris Kromm** is editor of *Southern Exposure*.

**Jane Slaughter** is a writer for *Labor Notes* where a previous version of this story appeared.

## Do you have a story for Southern News Roundup?

We’re always looking for interesting news, exposés, and stories that offer a fresh take on Southern life. If you have a story idea or lead we can follow, drop us a line:

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 Durham, N.C. 27702  
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 Fax: (919) 419-8315  
 Call: (919) 419-8311  
 x26

## These Streets Are Made for Walking

Last fall, *Walking* magazine released its list of America’s 11 “most walkable cities.” Among the criteria: a comprehensive network of sidewalks and trails; a safe and aesthetically pleasing environment; high-density, diverse development with lots of walking destinations; and visual evidence of people actually taking to the streets.



- Annapolis, Md.
- Chicago, Ill.
- Duluth, Minn.
- Glenwood Springs, Colo.
- Kingsport, Tenn.
- Madison, Wis.
- Naperville, Ill.
- New York, N.Y.
- Savannah, Ga.
- Vancouver, Wash.
- Waynesville, Ohio

Source: *Governing* magazine

## The South and Seattle



**I**n the final days of November, 1999, the city of Seattle was brought to a standstill. Over 40,000 activists gathered to protest the closed-door meetings of the World Trade Organization at the now-famous "Battle of Seattle," which united environmentalists, union members, human rights activists, consumer advocates, and others concerned about the rise of corporate power and the decline of democracy. The demonstrations shut down the WTO talks, and made history as one of the most powerful outpourings of popular protest in the latter part of the century.

But what's the legacy of Seattle for Southerners? Following up on our coverage of globalization in the South in "The Globalization Game," [Summer/Fall 1998], here are three views. The beginning essay is a first-hand account of the protests by Stuart Acuff, president of the Atlanta Central Labor Council, who brought a delegation from Georgia to the Seattle demonstrations. The second piece — a discussion of the impact of globalization in the South — was written by *Southern Exposure* editor Chris Kromm, and published in the *Raleigh News and Observer* and elsewhere after the demonstrations. And lastly, professor and activist Manning Marable shows why "'globalization' is not some abstraction, but a destructive social force that has practical consequences," especially for African Americans.

Together, these perspectives clearly show why "Southerners should remember Seattle."

# Through the Tear Gas, We Saw Our Power

By Stewart Acuff

Nobody could have anticipated what happened in Seattle the week of the World Trade Organization meeting.

Because nobody can anticipate movement. On November 30, 1999, 40,000 people in the streets Seattle representing labor, the environment, and human rights, experienced the energy, the press of humanity, the exhilaration that comes when and only when organization crosses the line into movement. Nobody there will forget it.

The headlines and many of the pictures were of a small group of committed anarchists, some ignorant mischief-making kids, the riot squads, and broken windows. But the real story on Tuesday, November 30 was of disciplined, well-trained student activists who took over streets and intersections and 30,000 marching, occasionally dancing trade unionists, environmentalists, and activists whose outrage at the WTO and corporate greed, and new-found respect and affection for each other, created a tangible human energy that built with the growing awareness that we had stopped the machine for a day.

We had stopped the machine, the faceless, soulless, global monster that turns children into robots, takes jobs and futures from good people, drowns turtles, levels old-growth forests, and causes governments to oppress and repress their own people.

Together, we had shut down Seattle and the WTO.

When was the last time a major American city was shut down by the forces of social justice? When was the last time our corporate masters didn't get their way?

We learned in our guts that day what we have been learning in our minds: child labor is directly related to prison labor, is directly related to environmental degradation, is directly related to sweatshops, is directly related to middle-class Americans forced into poverty, is directly related

to an obscene income and wealth gap. And that all of us who care about each of those abuses of our planet and our people only have the power to stop it when and if we act together.

We acted together in Seattle.

We didn't all do the same thing, but together we created a one-day movement harmony that shook a nation and maybe our world.

November 30 began at 4:00 a.m. for those of us an assignment to the AFL-CIO rally and march. We gathered at Memorial Stadium at 5:30 in drizzling, cold Seattle winter rain, hoping the numbers would come anyway.

About 9:00 we began to hear about downtown. The students were taking over the streets and intersections. The police were using pepper spray and tear gas.

Just in time for the rally – about 9:30 or so – the raining slowed, then stopped and the sun broke through.

The stadium began to fill. We knew it would hold 20,000, and it kept filling even as the speeches went on; the people kept coming, buses pouring in.

We had worried about too many speeches and too long a program. We were right to worry. Just as the stadium filled to capacity, they began to trickle out – not to go home, to hit the streets.

The Steelworkers went. Then the Longshoremen went, chanting "ILWU." As others went, Steve Yokich of the Autoworkers said, "It's time to march."

The crowd began to surge, like an irresistible human wave. We struggled to hold it until we could form up the front line.

Those of us with march responsibility struggled to do our job – to create space for the march and its frontline in streets jammed with people – knowing this was much more, and much bigger, than any other labor march. We felt the power – the power of unity that I've talked about since the sit-in at my Georgia high school in 1972.

Labor could not have stopped the WTO that day by itself; the students

were the frontline of that effort. But without 20,000 or 25,000 trade unionists filling the streets, the students and young activists would have been swept away much sooner and more viciously.

So we marched through the streets our allies occupied. They had taken the streets with civil disobedience, and they held the streets because we filled them with mile after mile of union people.

Together, we stopped them – for at least one day.

On Wednesday, December 1, we re-assembled on the docks for a Steelworker rally in spite of the police and Nation Guard backlash. Some trade unionists wanted to show solidarity with our allies – "the kids" – and respond to the police crackdown. So we assembled, and marched back into downtown, toward the WTO at the Westin Hotel and the Convention Center, growing in size as we went, following the leadership of unionists and young activists.

The police met us just off the waterfront with percussion grenades and lots of tear gas. I had smelled tear gas the night before, as we tried to clear the union people off the streets before the police sweep.

That night I was gassed – twice. As we struggled to stay together and keep our wits amid the intentional disorientation of the police, I kept thinking that my obvious middle-age maturity meant nothing to the people behind the face shields and black garb who launched the chemicals and wielded batons.

I split off, stumbling back to the apartment, eyes and throat burning. But a critical mass stayed together until they were dispersed by the police with their chemical tools in the wee hours of the night.

But one week in Seattle, we set the agenda, we stopped the machine, and they couldn't control the streets, nor us.

It won't be the last time.

# Southerners Should Remember Seattle

By Chris Kromm

Going by geography, people in the South couldn't be more removed from events on the Pacific Northwest coast. But Southerners have every reason to be concerned about what happened there last November, as the "Battle of Seattle" raged over the fate of the World Trade Organization and the global economy.

That's because the South, once thought of as an economic backwater, is arguably the most "globalized" region of the country today. And Southerners who care about working families, democracy, and environmental health - just like the citizens locked out of the WTO debates in Seattle - are learning to question the corporate-driven agenda the global power-brokers have in store.

The truth is, the South has always played a key role in world trade, dating back to the days of King Cotton's reign. But it's only in the last two decades that leaders in Appalachia, the Carolinas, and the Deep South have gone for broke in a quest to turn the South into a "global player" - promising to deliver the region to prosperity by aggressively exporting overseas, and luring the barons of global industry to the region.

By some measures, playing the globalization game has paid off. World sales of Southern goods are at record levels. The South has also emerged as the nation's boom-belt for German and Asian firms seeking low-cost labor and less-stringent environmental laws. The region has drawn over half of all the foreign businesses that have moved to the U.S. in the 1990s, and today, one out of eight manufacturing employees in the South work for an overseas owner.

But the quest for world-class status has come at a high price. Governors now spend precious weeks crisscrossing the globe, handing out billions of dollars in "recruitment packages" to entice migrating multinationals to set



Bette Lee/Impact Visuals

up shop in their state.

Taxpayers have been the biggest losers of these high-stakes industry bidding wars. It's not uncommon for states to ante up \$200 million or more to land a single plant - budget-busting deals that are made behind closed doors, and often at the expense of schools and other social priorities.

Southern leaders say they're doing it for the jobs. And it's true, the international firms have brought some good work - although few mention that the wages some firms (particularly German ones) pay are about 1/3 of what they pay back home (leading some German workers to refer to the U.S. South as "our Mexico.")

But the long-term picture - of a region all too willing to sacrifice its human, natural and financial resources for a quick fix is more troubling, and all too reminiscent of the economic low road to development prescribed for poorer nations by the WTO.

What's more, the South is learning that the globalization game is often a crap shoot that plays both ways. Globetrotting corporations often have little loyalty to the region - and in many areas, they are heading out of the South just as fast as they're coming in.

A recent study by the Economic Policy Institute found that the South has accounted for over a third of the

U.S. jobs lost to NAFTA - more than any other part of the country. Alabama, Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas topped the list of states that have felt the pain of foot-loose factories abandoning their communities and moving to even more profitable Third World pastures.

In some cases, these are the same foreign firms that were coaxed to the South with lavish incentives only a decade ago.

In short, the South has seen firsthand the world envisioned by the WTO. And it has learned that playing the globalization game - far from solving the region's economic ills - has only left Southerners all the more vulnerable to the whims of corporate interests and closed-door deal-makers.

Southerners have a direct stake in seeing that the demands of the Seattle movement become reality, here and abroad: to bring democracy to the WTO and other "development" decision-making bodies; to set and enforce real labor, environmental and human rights standards; and to ensure that the fruits of global prosperity are shared by all.

Without fair trade and economic democracy, the world only has to look to the South to see the rigged rules and high costs of playing the globalization game.

# Black Americans Must be in Forefront of Movement

Photoby Ajamu Dillabiant



Ashaki Binta of the Southern Center for Labor Education and Organizing speaks at the Center's second International Workers School in Atlanta in November, 1999. The Center has been a leader in organizing African-American workers against "corporate globalization."

## By Manning Marable

It was immensely significant for black America that the last major public demonstration in the U.S. in the 20th century was a protest over global economics and trade. More than forty thousand people came to Seattle to oppose the policies of the World Trade Organization, which since 1995 has functioned like an international cabal in league with powerful corporate and financial interests.

Labor activists went to Seattle to force the WTO to enact trade sanctions against nations that use child labor, prohibit labor unions and that pay slave wages to their workers. Environmental activists came to Seattle to pressure the WTO to ensure environmental safeguards would be part of any global trade agreements.

What motivated both labor and environmentalists is the political recognition that issues like human rights, employment and healthcare cannot be addressed individually as separate issues. Nor can they be effectively discussed only in the context of a single nation-state. Capital is now truly global, and any analysis of specific socioeconomic problems that may exist in our country must be viewed from an international perspective.

The WTO was set up to be the global headquarters for drafting and enforcing trading rules. When one member country challenges another's trading practices, disputes are settled secretly by panels of trade experts.

The WTO defines itself as a "trade" organization, which is incapable of pursuing social goals, such as extending the rights to freedom of collective bargaining to Third World and poor workers. Thus when an authoritarian regime markets clothing and athletic shoes that were produced by child labor under sweatshop conditions, the WTO claims that there is nothing it can do.

The demonstrations in Seattle, however, showed that growing numbers of Americans are recognizing that all of these issues – Third World sweatshops, the destruction of unions, deteriorating living standards, the dismantling of social programs inside the U.S. – are interconnected.

"Globalization" is not some abstraction, but a destructive social force that has practical consequences on how we live, work and eat. There is a direct connection between the elimination of millions of jobs that can sustain families here in the U.S., and the exportation of jobs into countries without unions, environmental and safety standards.

As real jobs disappear for millions of U.S. workers, and as welfare programs are eliminated, the only alternative is to use the prisons as the chief means of regulating mass unemployment. Thus in the 1990s in the U.S., a period of so-called unprecedented capitalist expansion, the number of prisoners in federal, state and local correctional facilities roughly doubled.

In 1998, 163 cities and 670 counties had unemployment rates that were more than 50 percent higher than the national average. These deep pockets of joblessness and hunger are not accidental: they represent the logical economic consequences of a nation that builds one hundred new prison cells a day and sanctions the exportation of millions of jobs.

Black Americans therefore should be in the forefront of the debates about international trade, but we must do so by recalling the activist slogan of the sixties: "Think Globally, Act Locally." There is an inescapable connection between Seattle and Sing Sing Prison, between the brutalization of Third World labor and what's happening to black, brown and working people here in the U.S.

As globalized capitalism destroys democracy, unions and the environment abroad, it is carrying out a similar agenda in our own backyards. For these reasons, we must create new organizations and a new political language that can unify international groups into collective protest action. We are challenged to build new political networks and information sharing across the boundaries of race, gender, class and nation. We must make the connections in the fight for democracy in the 21st century.

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# The Day the Flag Went Up

*South Carolina's flying of the Confederate flag over its State House has brought the state international infamy and a boycott by civil rights groups. But Daniel Hollis is one of the few who remember how the Stars 'n' Bars got there, and why.*



Photo courtesy of the American Socialist

**EVEN LIBERALS LIKE ADLAI STEVENSON, PICTURED HERE, EMBRACED THE CONFEDERATE FLAG IN THE 1950'S TO ATTRACT THE DIXIECRAT VOTE.**

angry enough about tariffs to start shooting?"

"The ruling elite that ran this state all owned slaves," Hollis said. "[The war] was over the states' right to own slaves and enforce white supremacy."

In fact, the 169 men who formed the South Carolina Secession Convention all

## By Bret Bursey

Daniel Hollis talks about Southern history with a familiarity and passion that makes it seem like he was there.

He credits his love of history to Lottie Barron, his American history teacher in high school. Hollis was the teacher's pet, but when Miss Barron told him that the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) awarded \$5 to the best history student every year, he worked even harder.

"I had to join the Children of the Confederacy to be eligible to win," Hollis recalled. "My grandfather was in the South Carolina 24th regiment. He was an excellent soldier, and I was accepted."

Hollis won the award that year. It was 1938 in post-depression Rock Hill, and \$5 was a lot of money.

Hollis' love for history manifested in a Ph.D. in American History from Columbia University and 36 years of teaching at the University of South Carolina's history department. His specialty was Southern history and

the Civil War.

In 1959, Gov. Fritz Hollings appointed Hollis to serve on a commission to plan the state's observance of the 100th anniversary of the War Between the States. President Dwight Eisenhower had commissioned a national Civil War Centennial, and the state centennial commissions were to coordinate activities.

"I'm the only one on the commission left alive," Hollis said in an August interview. "I tried to get them to call it the 'Civil War Centennial,' but they insisted on calling it the 'Confederate War Centennial.'"

"I was the only Civil War historian. There were three UDC girls on it, and John May was chairman. May was a state representative from Aiken. He called himself 'Mr. Confederacy' and wore a Confederate uniform to our meetings. I called May an 'inveterate Confederate.'"

"They would argue that the war wasn't fought over slavery but states' rights. That's ridiculous. Without the slavery issue South Carolina would not have seceded. You think they would have gotten

supported slavery and acknowledged in their "Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union" that slavery was the central issue.

At the time, James Pettigrew, a former legislator from Charleston, was one of the few political leaders to criticize the state's intentions of leaving the Union. "South Carolina is too large to be a lunatic asylum and too small to be a republic," he said of the plans to secede.

Hollis remembers the day the Confederate flag was hoisted over the State House to commemorate the war. The centennial kicked off on April 11, 1961, with a re-creation of the firing on Fort Sumter. The flag went up for the opening celebrations.

"The flag is being flown this week at the request of Aiken Rep. John A. May," reported *The State* (Columbia, S.C.) on April 12. May didn't introduce his resolution until the next legislative session. By the time the resolution passed on March 16, 1962, the flag had been flying for nearly a year. (This explains why the flag is often

erroneously reported to have gone up in 1962).

"May told us he was going to introduce a resolution to fly the flag for a year from the capitol. I was against the flag going up," Hollis said, "but I kept quiet and went along. I didn't want to get into it with the UDC girls." The resolution that passed didn't include a time for the flag to come down and, therefore, "it just stayed up," Hollis said. "Nobody raised a question."

Hollis said he doesn't recall any obvious racist or political overtones within the commission regarding the hoisting of the flag.

The day the Confederate flag went up over the State House, the opening ceremonies of the centennial in Charleston were marred by controversy. Newspapers reported the open and ugly feuding between South Carolina and the national Centennial Commission, calling it "the second battle of Fort Sumter."

The centennial delegations from New Jersey and Missouri included blacks who were refused entrance to the segregated Francis Marion Hotel, where the events were to be held — the South Carolina hosts refused to allow the black delegates to participate. In response, the Charleston NAACP organized protests.

The situation was only partially resolved when President John F. Kennedy issued an executive order moving the centennial meetings to the Charleston Navy Base, one of the few integrated facilities in town. South Carolina led the South in leaving the national commission, and holding its own segregated events in the hotel.

The dais in the ballroom of the Francis Marion was festooned with Confederate flags when Sen. John D. Long, who had sponsored resolutions that placed the flag over the House and Senate rostrums, warmed up the crowd: "Out of the dust and ashes of War with its attendant destruction and woe, came Reconstruction more insidious than war and equally evil in consequences, until



**HOLLIS: "I WAS AGAINST THE FLAG GOING UP, BUT I KEPT QUIET AND WENT ALONG. I DIDN'T WANT TO GET INTO IT WITH THE UNITED DAUGHTERS OF THE CONFEDERACY."**

the prostrate South staggered to her knees assisted by the original Ku Klux Klan and the Red Shirts who redeemed the South and restored her to her own."

Sen. Strom Thurmond, elected in 1956 on a staunch segregationist platform, and fresh from a run for president as a state's rights Dixiecrat, also spoke at the opening ceremony. He told the whites-only crowd that nowhere in the U.S. Constitution "does it hint a purpose to insure equality of man or things."

He said that the Founding Fathers created a republic rather than a democracy, "where everyone rules and majority rule is absolute." Thurmond warned the crowd that integration was a Communist plot designed to weaken America. "It has been revealed time and time again that advocacy by Communists of social equality among diverse races... is the surest method for the destruction of free governments."

"I am proud of the job that South Carolina is doing [in regard to segregation]," Thurmond said, "and I urge that we continue in this great tradition no matter how much outside agitation may be brought to bear on our people and our state."

The day the flag went up, headlines in the local newspapers were full of unrest. Besides the centennial controversy, the news that week included:

▲ Sen. Marrion Gressette, the head of the State Segregation Committee, created in 1951 to recommend measures to maintain segregation, was supporting a resolution condemning former North Carolina Gov. Frank Graham, who had spoken at Winthrop College defending the civil rights movement and calling for integration.

▲ Thurmond was fighting in Congress to keep federal funding for segregated schools. Political sentiment against school integration was so strong that state politicians vowed to stop all funding to public schools rather than integrate.

▲ The Freedom Ride with integrated bus loads of civil rights workers was on the road, and there were reports of violence along the route.

The major story of the week was Kennedy's executive order to end segregation in work places that do business with the government. The forced integration of South Carolina's mills outraged politicians and editorial writers.

Hoisting the Confederate flag over the State House didn't generate any controversy at the time. Perhaps those most offended by it were too busy fighting real-life battles to expend any energy on symbolic ones.

It has only been 38 years since the flag went up, but its defenders seem to have lost their short-term memory. Dr. Hollis calls them "historical revisionists."

He said there should be no denying that white supremacy was a vital aspect of this state's political will in 1861, just as it was in 1961. And there can be no separating the banners from this history.

When asked to comment on the current controversy over the flag, Hollis quoted George Santayana, who said, "Loyalty to our ancestors does not include loyalty to their mistakes."

Bret Bursey is publisher of *The Point*, a South Carolina newsmagazine, where an earlier version of this story appeared.

# Will Unions Organize the South?



Photo courtesy of UNITE

FIELDCREST-CANNON TEXTILE WORKERS CELEBRATE THEIR ELECTION VICTORY LAST YEAR. THE UNION SUCCESSFULLY SECURED A CONTRACT IN FEBRUARY, 2000.

**By Lane Windham**

While turtles and Teamsters were “together at last” in Seattle fighting the WTO last November, the movement was marching to a different - yet just as important - beat in the South.

Within a month, more than 20,000 Southern workers won a union. That’s more than formed unions in the South in the entire previous year. Ship yard workers, textile workers, Delta airline workers, Texas teachers and others across the South won a voice on the job despite a deep historical tradition of employer opposition. Many of them did it with help from their communities.

Dixie progressives had to wonder: Is this the moment we’ve been waiting for? Had the Carolina sands shifted? Had the red clay parted?

“Are things catching fire in the South?” asked Kirk Adams, AFL-CIO

Organizing Director. “Not quite. The truth is that there’s always been interest to organize among Southern workers. A nurse in Mississippi has a lot of the same issues and concerns as a nurse in California. What we are starting to see is a steady escalation of union investment and coalition building in the South.”

Adams’ cautious optimism underlines that while the turn of the next century isn’t seeing any seismic shifts in the South, there is an interesting level of activity afoot.

## When We Try More, We Win More

Statistics show that while Southern organizing still lags far behind 1970s levels, they are encouraging. Since 1996, there’s been a 17 percent increase in the number of union elections held across the South, rising to 435 in 1998. Workers have been winning a greater percentage of elections

since the mid-1990s, and the size of the groups voting is also steadily rising.

The efforts are paying off. Informal AFL-CIO data reveals that at least 33,000 workers have formed unions in the South in 1999, up from 12,000 in 1998. This jump is due largely to three large labor victories in 1999: 4000 Avondale shipyard workers, 5200 Fieldcrest-Cannon textile workers, and 9500 Austin teachers.

In addition, unions are growing in the South. Eight of twelve Southern states showed a net increase in the number of unionized workers last year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The year before, only South Carolina and Texas showed such a net increase.

Finally, more Southern workers say they want unions. New polling shows that more Southern workers would choose a union today than just two



# When labor tries more, it wins more

years ago. In 1999, 45 percent of Southern workers said they would definitely or probably vote for a union if a vote were held on their job tomorrow, up from 40 percent in 1997. In fact, the polling shows that while Southern workers were less open than other U.S. workers to unions in 1997, they are now just as likely to choose a union as workers elsewhere.

## Freedom to Have a Union

While Southern workers are increasingly open to unions, the South still has a cultural history of suspicion toward unions which employers both encourage and exploit. Companies that have a healthy respect for their employees elsewhere will often fight their employees when they try to come together in a union down South. Boeing, for instance, signed a top notch agreement with machinists in Seattle, but successfully fought an attempt by workers in San Antonio to form a union two months later.

At least two forces are at work to combat such deep-set antagonism toward workers' unions in the South. The first is community-labor alliances and the second is companies' own self-interest.

It's no secret that many Southern communities are anti-union. The South Carolina Chamber of Commerce has a "union avoidance information service" which includes a "section on community programs to avoid unionization."

As much as the Chamber would love to speak for the whole community, however, some Southern communities are speaking in an independent voice. Savannah county commissioners recently passed a resolution backing workers' freedom to choose a union. South Carolina churches gathered food for striking Continental tire workers last summer.

And dozens of ministers in Kannapolis and Concord, N.C., spoke from the pulpit the Sunday before the big Fieldcrest-Cannon vote on the im-

Photo courtesy of AFL-CIO



WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY AT THE AVONDALE SHIPYARD IN NEW ORLEANS.

portance of having a union. Just six years ago, the only ministers who spoke up were those whom the company organized to oppose the union.

Unions, in turn, are beginning to reach out.

"It's critical for us to get rooted in the community in the South and build long-lasting organizations," notes Monica Russo, director of the Unite for Dignity campaign in South Florida which has organized 33 nursing homes in the last three years, with strong support from the Haitian community. The unions, in turn, recently supported the Haitian community's movement to exempt Haitians from the Immigration Reform Act, just as Salvadorans and Guatemalans had been exempted.

"Where else would you see Cubans and African-Americans and Haitians together, rallying and walking the

halls lobbying in DC?" Russo asks. "That was real coalition."

## Making a Union in the Boss' Interest

The second force changing traditional Southern mores on unions, interestingly enough, is companies themselves. When workers and their communities raise the decibel level to a point that their issues can no longer be ignored, some companies simply stop fighting. This is especially true of companies new to the South with little historical stake in the region's anti-union culture.

When California-based Litton Industries bought Avondale shipyard in New Orleans, for instance, they agreed to recognize the workers' union in November rather than continue a fierce struggle.

"Decades ago, when the workers lost an earlier election, the company

**The South Carolina Chamber of Commerce has a "union avoidance information service" which includes a "section on community programs to avoid unionization."**

Most employers still would rather fight than play fair, and many communities and already-established unions are not building the necessary coalitions.



Photo courtesy of AFL-CIO

AVONDALE WORKERS FACED BITTER OPPOSITION TO THE UNION — LEADING TO THE MOST ALLEGED COMPANY VIOLATIONS IN NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD HISTORY.

put the election results up on the water tower," notes Wade Rathke, director of SEIU Local 100. "Living here in New Orleans, you can't overstate the importance of the Avondale victory, for those workers, and for all workers in the area."

The former Avondale management waged a six-year battle against this majority African-American workforce when they most recently voted for a union in 1993. The campaign was ruthless.

Charles Giles, for example, was a clerk at Avondale. When he came out for the union, management forced him to sit for days on the floor of the giant ship — without a desk, phone or even a pencil to do his job. The company fired dozens of workers and violated labor law so many times that this case became the largest in National Labor Relations Board history. The company even used taxpayer money at this Navy shipyard to fight

its workers.

One of the reasons the workers wanted the union was that the shipyard was among the most dangerous in the country.

"You put your boots on in the morning to go to work, and wonder who's going to take them off for you at night," said Frank Johnson, Avondale machinist for 16 years.

Workers used Avondale's reputation to organize the local ministers, many of who knew someone who had been hurt or killed there. A coalition of ministers came to rallies, cut radio ads, wrote legislators, and joined workers in April to carry white crosses emblazoned with the names of the de-

ceased workers.

OSHA later fined the company over half a million dollars and found that the company had willfully broken the law hundreds of times.

Then the Avondale workers finally got a break. The Navy's need to consolidate shipyards threw the industry into a bidding frenzy for mergers, and Litton Industries — which has a union shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi — bought Avondale. Rather than perpetuating this fight, Litton agreed to recognize the workers' union.

Why did Litton do this? It's impossible to know for sure, but partly it was because the spotlight was on them. They owed half a million in OSHA fines. The religious and civil rights communities in New Orleans were watching. The workers never let up. Plus, they needed a smooth operation between their yards, and didn't have the same personal stake in the fight as former management. In fact, Litton's

decision came one day after Avondale's staunchly anti-union CEO retired.

Similarly, 5200 Fieldcrest-Cannon workers got their union when new management from Pillowtex finally agreed to end the court battle and recognize that a majority of the workers had voted for a union.

### Not Optimistic, But Hopeful

Many Southern workers are trying to come together for better wages, benefits, and more of a say on the job, even in traditionally hostile territory. More than 30,000 Delta airline attendants, machinists, and ramp workers want to follow in the footsteps of the pilot ground training instructors who formed a union in November. The 9500 Austin teachers who formed a union are part of an ongoing effort by the teachers' union in Texas. Wireless telephone workers are winning unions at Southwestern Bell in Texas and Arkansas. Hotel workers in New Orleans are organizing with a unique coalition of unions.

Yet, Southern workers still have a lot to overcome. Most employers still would rather fight than play fair, and many communities and already-established unions are not building the necessary coalitions. A steady stream of victories will take a new commitment of energy and resources from unions, and a solid repositioning of Southern public attitudes.

"It's an uphill battle," said Reverend Jim Lewis, who is bringing together unions, environmentalists, clergy and others to take on the Del Marva region's poultry industry, and has organized in the South for years. "I'm not optimistic, but I am hopeful."

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Lane Windham is a media specialist with the AFL-CIO and used to organize in the South with the union UNITE. She was a *Southern Exposure* intern and is now an occasional contributor.

# Standing OUT

By Kim Diehl



Earlier in 1999, Jerry Falwell came out openly against a certain purple Teletubby™ who, he believed, was subliminally slipping gay propaganda into small children's minds. Why was this children's television character the target of a conservative religious figure's disapproval?

First, Tinky Winky is purple, a symbolic color that blends pink and blue—colors that have historically symbolized males and females. Second, the upside-down triangle on top of Tinky's head resembles the millions of triangles sewn onto the shirts of alleged queers in Nazi death camps during World War II, a symbol many queer organizations and activists use to symbolize remembrance and survival.

At first I snickered and dismissed Falwell for his homophobic crusades to wipe America clean of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people. Then I became angry. The words of Huey Newton, a founding member of the Black Panther Party, entered my mind: "Power is the ability to define phenomena."

Denouncing a children's television character for appearing "gay" is not only public persecution for queer people, but it is also a right-wing tactic used to delegitimize freedom struggles. Jerry Falwell, as ludicrous and reactionary as he is, has power,

and his announcement lumped same gender-loving people into one static community with a fixed set of symbols—defining for the world a gay phenomena.

This issue of *Southern Exposure* is an historic one. Our purpose is to revolutionize our thinking by capturing people's realities in a way that shows how racism, sexism, classism, and ageism are intertwined and that our identities are constantly shifting. As Matt Nicholson writes in "Trans Guys and Moonpies," "We all shift identities several times in our lives—from youth to adult, student to worker, healthy to sick." *Standing Out* allows queer people to shape, name or redefine phenomena on our own terms.

In this issue, we also take a close look at the organizing strategies of the Louisville Fairness Campaign in the hills of Kentucky. Embracing a broad social justice agenda, the Fairness Campaign has broken new ground and changed laws that had allowed job discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Their organizing strategy has broadened an activist base and sent a message to progressive communities that change is coming—and it's a multi-issue movement. Similarly, in a father-daughter dialogue between John and Wendi O'Neal, Wendi emphasizes the importance of a move-

ment built on a multi-issue strategy. She tells her father, "I feel in my body the intersections between race, class, gender and sexuality in ways that you don't experience."

The globalization of our cultures, economies, spiritualities, and policies is hurling us toward a time and place where our strategies can be united and our power shifted. We are also facing and working to eliminate serious threats to democracy, the environment, our bodies, our workplaces and our communities.

What does globalization and a new world order have to do with loving the same gender? This issue of *Southern Exposure* is built on the premise that a queer liberation movement can act as an agent to shift the power away from those who oppress to those who have historically been oppressed.

Within this issue we've also captured people's realities through Personal Hirstories<sup>1</sup>, first-person accounts by queer people of color that tell us there is no singular gay community, as Jerry Falwell would like to have us believe. Our decision to emphasize this is very strategic—as queer people we exist in multiple communities and subcultures—and we must define ourselves by our own terms.

So why do we use the word "Queer"? While blood flows and gun shots ring through the walls of mosques, synagogues, office buildings and schools, let's queerly defy the violence that sends so many spirits off this planet. As black men are dragged, Korean Americans shot, white gay men murdered, women raped on the job, and children drugged in schools, we can queerly shape a vision that cleans the air, educates students, cares for the elderly, houses the homeless, strengthens the spirits of the depressed, and transforms the hearts of those who hate.

<sup>1</sup> "Hirstory" is a genderless term used here to change the way we think of history—a straight male-dominated way of remembering ourselves and our struggles.

# Moving Mountains for Fairness



*In the hills of Kentucky, activists have led a groundbreaking campaign for gay civil rights. What lessons can we learn from the Fairness movement's struggle and success?*

**By Karen Stults**

**L**ouisville, Kentucky is located across a narrow stretch of the Ohio River from southern Indiana and has been described by some as "the northernmost Southern city." Despite the label it still has the feel of a Southern town.

The Southern character is felt in the city's porch-filled neighborhoods, housing some 350,000 people, spread out over a rambling 60-plus square miles. Louisville also reflects the reli-

gion of the Bible Belt, serving as home to the national offices of the Presbyterian Church, two seminaries, and countless communities of faith.

And on January 26, 1999, Louisville became a frontrunner in the struggle for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender civil rights. This was the day the Louisville Fairness Campaign convinced the city council to outlaw discrimination on the job

based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Later that year, a county wide ordinance extended these protections to housing, public accommodations and employment in the surrounding area.

The movement has spread throughout Kentucky. Lexington and Henderson have passed similar anti-discrimination ordinances, and smaller towns like Bowling Green and Owensboro are organizing for

legislative change.

The Louisville campaign to outlaw discrimination against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered people has been a remarkable legislative success story. It is also a study in patient, thoughtful organizing that has created a movement, forged new alliances, and left a mark on the community.

"People often think that you can't hang on to your ideals, support an inclusive justice agenda, and run a successful legislative campaign," says Carla Wallace, a founding member of the Campaign. "We proved that not only is it possible – it's the only way to win."

How they won – and the change that was wrought in the process – is a story that began over 15 years ago.

#### THE HUMAN RIGHTS BOMB

Gay civil rights organizing began in Louisville in the mid-1980s, when a group of progressive activists launched a campaign to have sexual orientation added to the city's existing civil rights code. The group spearheading the fight – the Greater Louisville Human Rights Coalition – was formed by lesbians and gay men who were deeply involved in battles against racism.

At first, the initiative didn't go far. The extreme right plastered the city with messages that "these people" would destroy the city, and town officials insisted Louisville wasn't ready to take the issue on. But these early efforts were successful in garnering the support of activists involved in anti-racist, feminist and faith-based organizing, and a few politicians went on record with their support for gay civil rights.

A turning point came in 1987. That year, an expanded group of activists organized a "March for Justice" to push for gay civil rights. This renewed effort drew hostile threats from opponents, but also strong support from straight allies, marking the beginnings of a visible gay civil rights movement in Louisville.

*Many considered the inclusion of sexual orientation a risky proposition. Organizers debated the Catch-22: Keep sexual orientation in, and they might lose. Take it out, and they were leaving part of the community behind.*

That same year, a hate-inspired cross-burning incident in an African-American neighborhood prompted a community-wide campaign for legislation against hate crimes. The diverse coalition argued the measure should outlaw crimes of hate based not only on race, but also sexual orientation.

Many considered the inclusion of sexual orientation a risky proposition. Organizers debated the Catch-22: Keep sexual orientation in, and they might lose. Take it out, and they were leaving part of the community behind. Eventually, the activists coalesced around inclusive language, and when anti-hate crime legislation passed two years later, it extended protections to sexual and racial minorities alike.

Many credit this victory with creating the momentum and groundwork needed to launch the Louisville Fairness Campaign.

"It gave people something to rally around," Wallace remembers. "It gave organizers an opportunity to link people to action."

By 1991, what had been an ad-hoc organizing effort was transformed

into a structured organization, with appointed leadership and a building to house the extensive education and organizing efforts of the Campaign.

#### A MODEL CAMPAIGN

Fairness Campaign activists quickly made their mark. Volunteer organizers made it their business to talk to everyone, everywhere, all the time. They talked to straight allies about the experience of being gay, and the reality of discrimination. Within their own community, they talked about the connections between race, class and gender; what it meant to be queer; and the importance of gender identity.

The discussions were hard, and not everyone agreed. But the effort was a successful exercise in education.

"They have done a phenomenal job of educating the public," says long-time civil rights activist Anne Braden of the Kentucky Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression. "They have been patient and persistent. And this dates back 15 years."

Patience and persistence were important early on, when Fairness legislation was considered and killed three times in nine years. While such defeats would have been a crippling loss to many, the Campaign made sure to define the mere consideration of gay rights legislation as a crucial gain.

"That they even had to stand up and vote [on a pro-fairness law] was a victory," says Pam McMichael, a Southern organizer and founding member of the Campaign. "The movement was the victory."

To get to that point involved widening the base of support and finding ways to link up with diverse groups – important work that would outlive any legislative success. With this long-term view, fairness advocates saw their organization and community grow.

# Who's Covered?

## The Question of Gender Identity

The laws recently passed in Jefferson County and the city of Louisville prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The inclusion of gender identity in each law is significant, and reflects an ongoing debate in the queer community.

In the Louisville ordinance, sexual orientation is defined as a person's actual or perceived heterosexuality, homosexuality, or bisexuality. Gender identity, on the other hand, is defined as having or being perceived to have an identity that is not traditionally associated with one's biological sex. This definition includes a range of people, including post-operative transsexuals, people transitioning between genders, masculine women and effeminate men who are routinely mistaken for the opposite sex, and people who cross-dress. The transgender community is both gay and straight.

The issue of gender identity is just beginning to be understood within the queer community – and wasn't always on the Fairness agenda.

That it eventually did become part of the civil rights battle is due in large part to the transgendered community. Dawn Wilson began living as a woman in 1994, and came out as a post-operative, male-to-female transsexual in 1996. She was a strong Fairness ordinance supporter, and was one of several people who pushed the Campaign to take a more inclusive stance on gender identity.

When Wilson learned that the Fairness Campaign was holding a Town Meeting in 1997 and not discussing the issue of gender identity because it seemed too "complex," she arrived with eight other transsexuals to speak out. Wilson and her contingent explained that to leave out gender identity was to leave everyone open to at-

tack, because it preserved an employer's right to discriminate on the perceived identity of any employee – gay or straight.

"This is a harder stance," explains F.M. Chester, another transgendered activist and Co-Chair of the Fairness Campaign. "There is no easy sound bite for gender."

Others feared that transgendered people would turn the movement into a "freak show." But the Fairness community eventually embraced this larger vision and included gender identities in all its legislative demands.

As it turns out, the Louisville ordinance falls short of protecting the entire transgender community. It is only illegal to discriminate for reasons "other than dress." This creates clear protections for post-operative transsexuals, but does little for butch women, effeminate men and long-standing or periodic cross-dressers who may or may not be gay who chose not to undergo sex re-assignment surgery.

Which gives people like Chester something to worry about. A nurse practitioner by trade, Chester was threatened with expulsion in her last semester of school at Vanderbilt University if she did not begin wearing women's clothing on the job. In order to complete her degree, she bought a new wardrobe and wore it, not only through graduation, but also through the first two years of her workplace loan repayment program. Not until she was fully licensed and debt-free did she feel like she could express her true identity – and it's still not easy.

"I feel pretty safe," she says, speaking after the passage of both ordinances. "But I have a box full of women's clothing in my attic – I'm afraid that sort of thing will happen to me again."

THEY ARE ALWAYS THERE FOR YOU

Central to the Campaign's success was establishing alliances and working in visible support of a range of issues affecting the Louisville community.

"For as long as I can remember," recalls Bob Cunningham of the Kentucky Alliance, "in all the struggles waged by the Alliance, the gay community has been there. When the Klan came to town, the Fairness community came out in force to protest."

"They were not only visible; they were in the majority," Cunningham adds.

Alice Wade, also of the Kentucky Alliance, further relates how Fairness activists are leaders in efforts to create a civilian police review board, to check the power of the city's predominantly white police force in black and gay communities. "On this and other issues," Wade explains, "Fairness is at the table. They are always there for you."

The Campaign's ground rule, however, was that they would not be invisible. The sentiment was clear: they would stand, protest and pray in solidarity, but as visible members of the Fairness community.

The Campaign also argued from the beginning that the Fairness cause was not separate from other community concerns.

"The gay community is a diverse community," explains Dan Farrell, current co-chair of the Fairness Campaign. "Low-income housing, minority contracts, disability rights, reproductive choice – these are all of our issues."

This perspective gave the Campaign a reputation of not only being "very good about reaching out to other groups," says Paul Whiteley of the labor-community Jobs with Justice coalition, "but also about instilling in their own members the notion that we're not just fighting for this ordinance, we're fighting for justice."

African-American and Latino/a residents who were not previously connected to social justice efforts

*But crossing the race divide in a city that is still largely segregated and mostly white has been a challenge for the Campaign.*

have also provided the Fairness cause with key leadership. Dawn Wilson, a black, transsexual female, was a visible spokesperson for the inclusion of gender identity in the ordinance (see sidebar, "Who's Covered?"). Alicia Pedreira, a Latina lesbian working as a therapist and social worker, became somewhat of a celebrity and key advocate when she was fired from her job at the Kentucky Baptist Home for Children because of her sexual orientation.

Such acts of solidarity may be one explanation for the incredible support for Fairness within the black community. In 1997, 71% of African Americans that were polled on the question of Fairness legislation were in favor. When Denise Bentley ran for Alderman in her predominantly black ward, only two of her 30,000 constituents expressed hostility toward her pro-fairness platform.

But crossing the race divide in a city that is still largely segregated and mostly white has been a challenge for the Campaign. "For a long time, we all thought that one of the benefits of being an organization that grew out of anti-racist organizing would be that it would automatically create a space for black queers to participate," says McMichael. "That hasn't happened."

Diane Moten is one person in the Campaign working to heal the divide. Moten, who is African American, first became involved in the Fairness cause as a volunteer while



CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER MATTIE JONES RALLIES FAIRNESS SUPPORTERS OUTSIDE LOUISVILLE CITY HALL.

working as a minister in her Baptist church.

Moten observes that there are lots of African-American gays and lesbians at the bars and elsewhere, but they're not showing up at Fairness events. She co-chairs the Campaign's Bridge Building committee, which uses community dialogues and other efforts to educate the broader community. She's now working on bringing the video "All God's Children" – a documentary about the experience of African-American, Latino/a and Asian gays and lesbians in religion – to black churches in Louisville.

Which is one reason why Mandy Carter – a creator of "All God's Children" and field director of the North Carolina-based National Black, Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum – says, "I haven't seen anything like this in North Carolina or anywhere else. It's a powerful model we can build on."

Another challenge has been the Religious Right, the loudest voice of opposition to gay civil rights in churches, high-school auditoriums, and editorial pages across the state.

"In a place like Louisville the church plays a really important role in people's lives," explains Reverend Ann J. Deibert. And many people of faith have an intense and irrational fear that this is against God, that we are spitting in God's face if we support this lifestyle."

But in the 1990s, a group of clergy formed Religious Leaders for Fairness to prove that being Christian does not mean being anti-gay. In suits and collars, this mostly-white group of progressive clergy lobbied their representatives at the city, county, and state levels. They sponsored "talk back" seminars in churches, allowing congregants to discuss issues of homosexuality and fairness. And they provided support for pro-Fairness pastors who were being challenged for their stance.

At the same time, Fairness advocates in the African-American community were busy countering their own anti-gay ministers. Black anti-Fairness ministers were few in number, but working hard to position themselves as "the voice" of the community.

The Kentucky Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, along with pro-Fairness ministers

Photo courtesy of the Louisville Courier-Journal



**FAIRNESS CAMPAIGN LEADER PAM MCMICHAEL SPEAKS AT A MEETING TO COUNTER ATTEMPTS TO SPLIT THE CAMPAIGN ALONG RACE LINES. THE MULTI-RACIAL GATHERING WAS CALLED BY THE CAMPAIGN, SOUTHERNERS ON NEW GROUND, AND OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS.**

and other prominent African-American leaders, took a strong stand against this minority voice. Many drew on the lessons of the not-so-distant 1960s, reminding people of a time when there were no civil rights for African Americans. Their message sunk in, that "God welcomes everyone."

"That's important for people who are in the church – and people who have left the church – to know," says Rev. Deibert.

#### THE POWER OF A PAC

Advocates feel that the Campaign's eventual victory was sealed when it recognized the need for a strong electoral strategy, and established C-FAIR – a pro-Fairness Political Action Committee.

While the Campaign educated the public and built key alliances, C-FAIR identified, endorsed, and helped run pro-Fairness candidates for political office. Since passage of the ordinance rested entirely upon the votes of 12 elected Aldermen, this strategy proved crucial.

"With each new fairness ordinance introduced," explains C-FAIR president Maureen Keenan, "It became clear who our friends were and were

not; who would respond to a moral imperative and who would respond only to votes."

The grassroots-electoral combination was powerful. C-FAIR built on the Campaign's strong, grassroots base and put muscle behind a few strategic candidates who they believed could shake loose the needed votes.

In 1996, that candidate was Denise Bentley, an African-American woman who had taken a strong and public stand against discrimination in the workplace when she refused to fire a gay employee. When she ran for office later that year, she ran on a pro-Fairness platform.

Backed by Fairness people-power, Bentley soundly beat her rival – a 12-year incumbent and anti-fairness Alderman. Once elected, Alderwoman Bentley co-introduced Fairness legislation with colleague Tom Owen, which was quickly defeated.

C-FAIR put their efforts behind Emily Boone in 1997, who also ran against an anti-Fairness and deeply-entrenched incumbent. Boone lost, but her campaign garnered 40% of the vote – a high level of support for a first-time candidate. Her showing was strong enough to scare her in-

*"They have always understood that ours is one movement for justice," says Lobel. "When they say 'Fairness,' they mean it, and when they say 'equality,' they show it every day."*

cumbent opponent into reconsidering his vote.

By 1998, the Fairness community had helped to seat five committed fairness supporters on the Board of Aldermen. A sixth who had abstained in 1997 was on record as a yes vote for the 1998 legislative year. Bowing to overwhelming voter sentiment, the seventh Alderman — Emily Boone's opponent — offered the winning vote in favor of a Fairness in employment ordinance. It was signed into law in 1999.

#### THE LOUISVILLE LEGACY

By all measures, the Louisville Fairness Campaign has been historic. While the principles of persistent organizing, alliance building, and electoral presence may all seem like common sense, the Campaign's success in putting these ideas into action is viewed by many as ground-breaking.

"In my travels I've seen many people who desire to do queer organizing in ways that connect to broader issues," says Pam McMichael. "But I haven't seen many organizations that have integrated it into their work. And there are not that many queer organiza-



# Today, Louisville; Tomorrow, the State

“We are changing the hearts and minds of Kentuckians”

*Photo courtesy of the Louisville Courier-Journal*



**KENTUCKY FAIRNESS ALLIANCE DIRECTOR MARIA PRICE: ACTIVISTS HAVE “FORGOTTEN THE BASICS.”**

tions working on legislative campaigns, period.”

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force director Kerry Lobel agrees.

“I brag on the folks in Kentucky wherever I go. Why? Because [they] have always understood that ours is one movement for social justice. Both organizations have made remarkable coalitions with people of color, the poor, women, people of faith, labor organizers, welfare rights organizers,” says Lobel, referring to the Louisville campaign and the Statewide Kentucky Fairness Alliance (see sidebar “Today Louisville; Tomorrow the State.”)

“When they say ‘Fairness,’ they mean it, and when they say ‘equality,’ they show it every day,” Lobel adds.

Another enduring legacy of the Fairness movement has been a shift in the city’s balance of power.

“The gay community has become a force to be reckoned with,” says Bob Cunningham of the Alliance. “No politician in his right mind is going to speak too loudly against the gay community because they have power.”

While five years ago, a C-FAIR endorsement was seen as a kiss of death, now public officials compete for it because they know the Fairness community can deliver the people and the votes.

“That’s good for all of us,” says Cunningham, “because it shows what can be done when you come together and organize.”

Paul Whiteley, of Kentucky Jobs with Justice, tells a similar story of a rank and file union member who was never particularly supportive of the Fairness Campaign – but who recently said to one of his peers, “We can learn something from them about how to pass this [living wage] ordinance ... if we want a living wage, that’s what we’re going to have to do.”

The Campaign has also served as a kind of training camp for activists and organizers in Louisville, espe-

Many groups claim to be statewide in their impact and commitment. The Kentucky Fairness Alliance really is.

Based in Louisville, the Kentucky Fairness Alliance (KFA) shares history and office space with the local Fairness Campaign but focuses its organizing on “the other 119 counties” across the state. KFA’s mission is to develop leadership, build alliances, educate the public, and increase participation in the democratic process outside of Louisville.

With several impressive victories to its name, KFA has achieved national acclaim and is considered a model in statewide organizing.

“They have done the unthinkable in a very short amount of time,” says National Gay and Lesbian Task Force director Kerry Lobel. But to KFA director Maria Price, it’s fundamental. She mentions a recent conference, when she was asked to talk about statewide queer organizing.

“I told people about how we did what seemed to me like really basic stuff,” explains Price. “Base building. District lobbying. Bringing folks to the state capital. Just basic

grassroots organizing to win legislative support.”

When she finished, people came up and expressed their amazement at what she’d done. Which led Maria to conclude, “We’ve forgotten the basics.”

If, or perhaps when, Kentucky passes state-wide anti-discrimination legislation, it will be among only a handful of states to have done so (see “The State of Civil Rights,” page 33).

But it will not be without a fight. The Religious Right is strong in the state and has a history of spending big money on anti-gay propaganda.

In the meantime, KFA continues to shape public opinion in conservative Kentucky towns, and to make it safer for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered people to be out in their communities. They’re running radio ads in the eastern mountains, holding gay film festivals in mid-sized towns, and reaching out to high school counselors and clergy across the state.

As Price says, “We are changing the hearts and minds of Kentuckians.”

— K.S.

*I think about the issue of civil rights for African Americans. They got anti-discrimination laws on the books 35 years ago, and discrimination still occurs.*

cially the younger generation. "There were all these people who didn't feel like leaders and who were brand-new to organizing," says Carla Wallace. "Fairness gave people a place to come out, to tell their story, to get involved."

#### THE LONG ROAD TO FAIRNESS

In Louisville, gay civil rights were built on trust and over time. And the work is far from over.

Fairness advocates see garnering statewide protective legislation for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered people as the next great battle.

"Given the state of Kentucky," says Maria Price, director of the statewide Kentucky Fairness Alliance, "statewide legislation makes perfect sense because discrimination does not stop at the county border."

Meanwhile, there are legislative victories to maintain in Henderson, Lexington, Louisville and Jefferson County, and ongoing organizing to support in several of Kentucky's more isolated towns and rural areas.

The Fairness movement's success has also sparked a well-organized backlash by the religious right. The Louisville and Jefferson County laws are being subjected to a legal challenge brought by the Pat Robertson-founded American Center for Law and Justice on behalf of a local doctor who claims that employing gays and



CARLA WALLACE AND COUNTY COMMISSIONER JOE CORRADINO EMBRACE AFTER THE PASSAGE OF THE JEFFERSON COUNTY FAIRNESS ORDINANCE.

lesbians violates his freedom of religion.

The passage of the Lexington ordinance prompted the formation of Equal Rights Not Special Rights, which includes veteran anti-gay campaigner Kent Ostrander of The Family Foundation on its board.

There are still gaps in coverage, too, such as the fact that "religious organizations" are exempt from the Louisville and Jefferson County ordinances (but not the Henderson statute). Many of these organizations – like the Kentucky Baptist Home for Children which fired Alicia Pedreira – receive well over 51% of their budget from public sources, questioning their status as independent religious institutions.

And questions about improving racial diversity within the primarily-white Fairness community – and better sexual diversity within primarily-straight social justice organizations – remain. Fortunately, the Campaign's work has begun to create a space where people can ask those questions as they look to the road ahead.

"When I think about what still needs to be done," says Rev. Deibert, "I think about the issue of civil rights for African Americans. They got anti-discrimination laws on the books 35 years ago, and discrimination still occurs. So there is still a lot of work to be done. We have our life's work cut out for us."

*Karen Stults is a writer based in Washington, D.C.*

## *The State of Civil Rights*

*Despite recent gains, gay and lesbian people have few legal protections*



By **Deb Price**

**T**hey don't want to be first or last to do most anything. They want to be modern, but not radical; traditional, but not backward. So, because states see one another moving toward embracing their gay citizens, the momentum for progress is starting to snowball.

The 2000 presidential and congressional campaigns certainly demand attention, yet our day-to-day lives are shaped in large measure by state politics. State laws and courts, for example, normally control who can marry, who can adopt, whether unmarried couples have legal rights, how hate violence is punished and whether adults' sexual privacy is invaded.

And since Congress has yet to protect basic gay civil rights, whether gay people are shielded from bias in employment, housing and public accommodations depends on state and local governments.

The good news is that the state's lawmakers and judges are responding more favorably than ever before to gay pleas. Advances in state laws, judicial rulings, corporate employment and benefit policies, and public opinion are creating a gay-friendly synergy. The 1999 legislative season, which broke all records for gay state-level progress, pointed toward even better years.

As National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Director Kerry Lobel points

out, today's breakthroughs are a result of gay people's willingness to be out at home and at work, in small towns and big cities.

"As more of us are living openly, we touch the lives of people who are closest to us, who touch the lives of people closest to them. Our visibility is a ripple in a pond. It reverberates in ways we can't even measure," she says.

When we do try to measure progress, using one giant federal yardstick probably isn't the best approach. Ironically, as NGLTF notes, a set of smaller state and local yardsticks provides a better indication of how far we've come as a nation – and how far we still have to go:

### ▼ **Protective job gear:**

Laws in 11 states, 18 counties and more than 100 cities protect 103 million Americans from anti-gay job discrimination and often from bias in housing and public accommodations. That's 38 percent of the U.S. population.

## Gay/Lesbian/Bi/Trans Civil Rights Laws in the U.S.



**State law enacted banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity (1 state plus District of Columbia)**  
 District of Columbia (1977); Minnesota (1993)

**State law enacted banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (10 states)**  
 Wisconsin (1982); Massachusetts (1989); Connecticut, and Hawaii (1991); California, New Jersey, and Vermont (1992); Rhode Island (1995); New Hampshire (1997); Nevada (1999)

**State law enacted and repealed by ballot measure (1 state)**  
 Maine (passed 1997, repealed 1998)

\* An Oregon appellate court ruled that the state law prohibiting sex discrimination in the workplace also covers sexual orientation. The state has not determined whether or not it will appeal the ruling.  
 Source: National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, 1999

### ▼ Fair play mandates:

Following San Francisco's hugely successful lead, Los Angeles and Seattle are telling would-be city contractors, "If you want to play ball with us, you must give the same benefits to gay and straight workers."

### ▼ Bedroom snooping:

Only 18 states still have sodomy laws – archaic, privacy-violating sex laws primarily used as an excuse to discriminate in, for example, custody decisions. Georgia's top court hastened the demise of sodomy laws nationwide by striking down its infamous law in 1998.

### ▼ Saying no to hate:

This year, new states will likely join the 23 with hate-crimes laws covering anti-gay attacks.

### ▼ Family matters:

Even among gay-marriage foes, there's a growing realization that gay couples haven't been treated fairly. Seven states and 83 localities offer domestic partner benefits to their own workers. California and 41 local governments have domestic partner registries.

A recent Vermont court decision requiring the state to offer same-sex couples all the legal benefits of marriage "will cause lots of other state legislatures that have made clear they are not open to (gay) marriage to start reconsidering whether they ought to be doing something in terms of domestic partnership," predicts Matt Coles, chief gay-rights attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union.

## The Right to Privacy in the U.S.



**No sodomy law - free state - (32 states & District of Columbia)**  
 Some of these states still have laws on the books, but they have been declared unconstitutional and unenforceable in the state's court.

**Same gender sodomy law only - state not free - (5 states)**

**Opposite and same gender sodomy law - state not free - (13 states)**

\* In February 1999, a Louisiana court declared the state's sodomy law unconstitutional. An appeal of the decision is expected.

Source: National Lesbian & Gay Task Force, 1999

Deb Price lives in Maryland, where she writes for the Washington bureau of *The Detroit News*. Price is co-author with Joyce Murdoch of *And Say Hi to Joyce: America's First Gay Column Comes Out* (Doubleday, 1996). Maps courtesy of The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, December 1999.

# *Trans Guys and Moonpies*



*A Dialogue with a  
Down-Home  
Transgendered Leather  
Couple*

**By Matt Nicholson**

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I was standing in a hotel lobby in Lorel, Maryland, feeling a bit unsure if I belonged. The internal conversation churned in my head: what does it mean to be a good ally? About 300 female-to-male (FTM) transgendered people were mixing and mingling for True Spirit '99 – a conference organized by the American Boyz, a support and social group for people who were labeled female at birth, but feel it is not a

complete or accurate assessment of who they are. For many of these folks, this was the one time of year they would be around others like themselves, and the last thing I wanted to do was be disruptive.

Without warning, a tempest of bubbling energy whirls up to me, grabs my hand, and squeals, "Girl, what *do* you call that color nail polish?" I find myself staring, a bit dumbfounded, into the bright eyes



of a smashingly handsome trans man in a leather jacket and collar, with a bushy black and white feather boa draped across his shoulder. Grasping for composure I utter, "Honey, it's called *Starry Night*, and you can borrow some any time." Not exactly Oscar Wilde, but it's enough to elicit a peal of laughter from this fine gentleman.

He introduces himself as Bo (but has since moved on to using the name Brody) and flourishes at his square-framed, and equally noticeable, partner Alex (also a trans man who has since moved on to using the name Keller.)

Both live in Florida and are waiting to begin the medical procedures that will allow them to live as the

people they know themselves to be. Both in their early twenties, they are among a group of young FTMs at the conference who are challenging notions of what it means to be men, and even transgender. Keller is Haitian-American, and one of a few people of color at the conference. Brody is white, and together they are one of the even fewer interracial gay male couples.

Definitions of the word "transgender" vary as widely as the people the word is intended to describe. Roughly, it is an umbrella term used for anyone who transgresses, or lives outside of, gender norms. It can include transsexuals, crossdressers, intersexuals (what doctors call hermaphrodites), two-spirit people,

androgyns, and a host of other identities.

It can be confusing because all people cross gender barriers at some point in their lives. Defiance of gender norms vary from someone who has lived up until age 50 as a man and decides to use medical procedures to become a woman, to the nine-year-old girl who is labeled a tom boy for liking sports. The transgender movement was born of the desire to bring freedom of gender expression to the whole of society, and to protect the lives of those whom society deems unacceptable in terms of gender.

*"A lot of the events around here are just too expensive. So we don't go. I mean, I'm a 'bring me a moon pie and an RC Cola' kinda guy." I wonder if the price of assimilation doesn't hover somewhere around the cost of a ticket to a black-tie function.*

When I think about Southern people whose interests are often left out of national debates about queerness, my thoughts drift to this striking Floridian pair. Mainstream gay organizations and activists rarely comment on people who don't have the right-sized bank account, a common gender, or a sexuality fit for prime-time television. Conservative gay and lesbian people often express outrage when leather and trans people are depicted as part of their community in the media. Keller and Brody both feel that poor gay people are also excluded and made to seem exotic in mainstream gay communities.

Keller seems particularly up in arms about this. "It's like, 'Look, I had sex with a construction worker. Isn't that quaint. You can change your own oil, whoopie.'"

Brody adds, "A lot of the events around here are just too expensive. So we don't go. I mean, I'm a 'bring me a moon pie and an RC Cola' kinda guy."

I wonder if the price of assimilation doesn't hover somewhere around the cost of a ticket to a black-

tie function.

There is a feeling that people who don't appear normal enough will embarrass the larger group and act as a barrier to civil rights. To be gay or lesbian is to defy gender expectations. For many of us the argument that "we are just like everyone else" is impossible to make.

Transgendered people run the gamut from conservative to radical just like any other group, but we have the most to learn from those for whom assimilation is not an option.

Coming out is a central process in a lot of queer people's lives. The problem, of course, is that Keller and Brody have come out several times into different identities. Brody tells me that today they have been out buying restraints, but found they could get their own materials and make them cheaper. "We're the Martha Stewarts of leather," he quips. They both struggle with what it means to be out as members of the leather community, recognizing that there are certainly limits to what people are willing to hear.

As in any good leather relationship, power is an important topic with broad implications for them. Playing with the boundaries of pain and pleasure through giving someone the trust to safely explore those boundaries requires a lot of open communication. Brody shares with me that he has had to spend some time thinking about what it means to be a white "bottom" to a black "top."

But, as Keller says, "If people spent more time exploring what they liked than worrying about 'am I doing this because I'm a racist,' they'd be a lot happier."

Coming out as trans – in this case as FTM – has broad race and class implications. I have met very few trans people who did not lose their job when they chose to come out at work. Yet, when an FTM person begins passing as male full-time, they begin to acquire male privileges. FTMs of color often face the challenge of transitioning from what our

white supremacist society views as a female sexualized object to a male violent predator. White FTMs are usually met with the challenge of how to deal with being perceived as, and given the benefits of, white males.

But of course, these privileges are always conditional. If FTMs are arrested or have to go to the hospital, the power/privilege pyramid can come crashing down on top of them. If medical procedures become part of their journey, things get real expensive real quick. The question of who can afford to transition under our current medical system remains central to trans people's quest for liberation.

A big step with them, as for many FTMs, is taking testosterone injections to deepen their voices, shut down reproductive systems, and begin the growth of some facial hair. These changes, and the many others that will occur, come in varying degrees over varying periods of time, but allow most people to interact with society as someone who is perceived to be a man.

Brody shares his own path:

"When I was young I always thought I would grow up to be a boy. And when that didn't happen, I guess I ... well there was this period where I just sort of put that stuff down for a while. When I got to college, the other masculine women I saw were all dykes so I identified as a lesbian, with the political life and all. But I was sleeping with guys the whole time. Then I had this epiphany while reading Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*. And I realized that I could do these things; I could go on hormones and have top surgery (FTM slang for removing one's breasts) and be a guy."

Keller, in his to-the-point manner, adds his part of the story: "Yeah, I had a similar awakening. Mine was at True Spirit this year, though. So I guess it was more recent than Brody's."

Keller is not out to his family,

where gender roles are very strict. His parents came to this country in 1974, and moved several times before landing in Florida 12 years ago.

"I don't think my parents are officially citizens 'cause they never really made a big deal outta stuff like that," he relates. "I really can't relate to the 'Black-American experience' people always talk about. My parents were not too concerned with Americanizing."

Coming out often leads to new lifestyles and new values. Many privileged people do not engage in political struggles until they come out as something the systems finds unacceptable – and begin to lose privileges on which they've come to depend. Yet so much of our politics

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have ever known a  
trans person, or  
thought outside of a  
two-gendered system  
or not, most have  
come to agree that  
gender is, to some  
varying degree,  
something we learn  
as we grow up. So  
what does that mean  
for folks who have a  
voice from within  
telling them that  
they are something  
they weren't  
taught to be?*

in this country is based on identity. We all shift identities several times in our lives – from youth to adult, student to worker, healthy to sick. But what does a politics of an overt and stigmatized gender change look like?

"Well, right now it doesn't look like too much of anything," Brody tells me. "When I first came out as trans I saw this need for some kind of support group. And initially it was for all trans people, but then it just seemed like the issues that male-to-females (MTFs) faced were just a lot different. So then I formed a group for just FTMs, but then people weren't coming regularly and we got busy. So, ya know..." At this point, Keller chimes in with something I hadn't anticipated, "And a lot of the guys didn't like that we were fags."

As for race and gender, Keller observes that, "People are less comfortable dealing with race than with gender. What does it mean to be black or white? It's very basic to the color of their skin and where you come from. Everyone is so afraid of talking about race because they're so afraid of being called a racist."

Whether or not they have ever known a trans person, or thought outside of a two-gendered system or not, most have come to agree that gender is, to some varying degree, something we learn as we grow up. So what does that mean for folks who hear a voice from within telling them that they are something they weren't taught to be?

"I really wrestle with that," Keller says. "It's like the whole nature vs. nurture issue. I look at it in the same way as how people know they're gay. It's not necessarily based on behavior. I can't accept that it's just socialization. I wasn't encouraged to do boy things."

Growing up, Brody says, "Dad always took me to the western shops to buy specifically boys clothes. I don't mean to suggest that Dad made me trans, but if he did I owe him a thank you card. Basically, I'm a fashion whore. I like really really masculine clothes. I have this very big redneck



**PETRIC J. SMITH, ONE OF THE SOUTH'S LEGENDARY TRANSGENDERED PEOPLE. SMITH WAS BORN ELIZABETH COBBS, AND KNOWN AS THE WOMAN WHO TESTIFIED AGAINST HER UNCLE, ROBERT CHAMBLISS, WHO WAS CONVICTED OF THE 1963 BIRMINGHAM CHURCH BOMBING THAT KILLED FOUR YOUNG GIRLS.**

part of me – and some preppy gear, oh, and maybe some hip hop," he admits with a healthy dose of white-guy-nerdiness.

"I'm very tailored at work, but I have a silver chiffon boa trimmed with silver feathers," Brody adds. "I can be the biggest nelly princess on the planet. I'm a man of many facets."

Keller offers a bit of wisdom about being transgendered in the South. "It's easier to pass [once you've transitioned]. People in San Francisco are more familiar with what to look for. Here people take you at face value. If you look like a man and smell like a man, you must be a man."

Clearly, Brody and Keller – as individuals, and as a couple – encompass their right to be complex, and sometimes contradictory. Somehow all these pieces fall together as they eye their dream of breeding and raising horses, hopefully on a ranch somewhere in Florida or northern Georgia. **S**

Matt Nicholson is a "middle class, cross dressing white Southern transplant," active in the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender communities in Durham, NC. He also works for young worker's rights at the NC Occupational Safety and Health Project. He relates that Keller and Brody have opted to not have their pictures appear in *Southern Exposure* prior to their transitions.



# What's Sex Got to Do With It?



*“The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling.”*

**By Mab Segrest**

— Audre Lorde, “The Power of the Erotic”

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**I** was a virgin until I was twenty-one, the night a guy from Dartmouth came down to Montgomery with his rowing team and got me drunk as a skunk and I stripped naked with him behind the country club and we had sex, me alternately exclaiming “I am the earth mother” and “I am not an easy lay!” I retrieved my grass-stained dress, the

only thing I had to wear to church the next morning as I repented as best I could through a headache that started at my shoulder blades and scrambled the syntax of the Doxology and the Apostle’s Creed.

I did not know to masturbate until I was twenty; I had figured anything that had “master” in it was only for men.

This is not to say that I was not in love with girls and women since I was at least about four, beginning with my Mama and my next door neighbor Judy. One of my early memories is of Judy riding her bike on the sidewalk across the street while I was standing in a new dress getting my picture taken, a photo that failed to show my little heart

snapping out of my chest towards Judy's churning legs and the spinning spokes. Preadolescence was the perfect cover; females are not yet expected to have matured into heterosexuality.

But by thirteen, all my girlfriends shifted their emotional allegiance to boys, leaving me exposed. They spent their spare time groping with the most uninteresting males on the plastic seats of old cars, while I prac-

been a relief; instead, I had painfully visible efforts at invisibility, futile efforts to suck all my energy back in: a child of the universe, trying to be a black hole. I had little means to figure the "curious abrupt questions [that] stirred within me," as the great faggot poet of democracy Walt Whitman wrote, questions of how "I had received identity in my body, [that] I was I knew was of my body, and what I knew I should be I knew I should be of my body."



ticed the piano, wondering if there was something about me that would always keep me from love.

I was not so much out of sight, as out of language. I didn't know the word "homosexual" until I read it when I was eleven or twelve, in the early 60s, in an article in *Life* magazine, one of the first treatments of the urban gay subculture in the mainstream media. In the back corner of my brain in which I allowed such conversations, it occurred to me that the word might explain a lot. But my problem, at nine and thirteen and twenty, was not that I was not seen; more that I was not named. Or, the names available carried such lethal stigma.

Queer: alone, outside community, outside family, outside love, the only one. Genuine invisibility would have

So the struggle to fix elusive language to the slippery category of sexual identity has been a central preoccupation of my life, as it has been for many lesbians and gay men of my generation.

My task in this essay is to look at sexuality as a dynamic of power, a shaper of identity and culture; and at heterosexism and homophobia as part of the tangled intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality in Southern and U.S. culture.

Forces such as globalization, structural adjustment, privatization, downsizing, automation and new information/computer technologies are propelling us into the next century through decisions made by a minuscule segment of the population, the ultra-rich and CEOs of multinationals. The results – a declining

economy and cultural deterioration – are blamed on the most vulnerable among the rest of us, with sexuality at the core of scapegoating mythologies about welfare, crime, and gay rights.

Yet in discourses of civil rights and economic materialism, sexuality is often left over from, or out of, the discussions. I am convinced that clarity on the question of sexuality is a requirement if we are to create a qualitatively different human interaction going into the next millennium.

#### RACE AND THE INVISIBLE DYKE

As an adolescent, with no one available to translate for or with me the language of my body, I began to translate it myself into the language of race. When I was thirteen, in 1963, I lay on my belly underneath some shrubs to watch several black children my age walk across the breezeway at my high school, surrounded by hundreds of state troopers sent by George Wallace to keep my school from integrating.

I have circled back many times to my moment of identity with the three black children inside the circle of force, a "queer" empathy with their aloneness. It has since occurred to me that they might instead have felt a huge sense of power and pride together at having braved the troopers, after the President of the United States threatened to federalize the National Guard in their behalf. But to me, they were lonely because I was lonely, and we were all surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass.

I saw also, clearly, how race and sex and white people's confusions about both were hopelessly intermingled. Even from my segregated family, I could see that the Black uprising all around me was deeply spiritual in its challenge to the morality of white supremacist culture. But I heard white people defending that culture by attacking the sexual morality of the civil rights movement. The Selma to Montgomery March, one of the great ethical pilgrimages

## Profile:

# Southerners on New Ground

**S**outherners on New Ground was founded six years ago by black and white Southern lesbians who saw a need for organizers to integrate their work against racism, sexism and economic injustice into lesbian/gay/trans organizing. SONG's purpose is to build a progressive movement by developing models of organizing that incorporate queer liberation into Southern freedom struggles.

This year, SONG will be launching their Bayard Rustin Project, which will target Southern organizations doing anti-racism work. Rustin, who was a founding member of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the 1940's, helped organize the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56, and was a direct influence for the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Rustin was an out, black pacifist, a Quaker, and one of the movement's most skilled strategists who influenced black leaders like Dr. King, A. Philip Randolph, and Dorothy Height.

The campaign will offer organizational training and on-going workshops about intergenerational, anti-homophobic, and anti-racist organizing.

"Our goal [for the project] is to make the connections between race, class, gender and sexual orientation for

people of color without making the issues the same," explained Craig Washington, SONG's co-director. "We hope people of color will experience the healing necessary to overcome internalized oppression while strengthening queer people of color organizations in the South."

SONG celebrated the faces of queers in Appalachian communities at their third Mountaintop Festival at the Highlander Center last September. Pam McMichael, SONG's co-director, said, "The focus of the festival, co-sponsored with LGBT and ally groups in the region, is to provide organizing opportunities in isolated areas and celebrate queer people's visibility right where they live."

SONG recently took a trip to South Africa to learn more about the parallels between the civil rights movement in the Southern United States and anti-apartheid work in South Africa. South Africa's struggle to heal from apartheid has led to the development of a new Constitution – making it the first country to include sexual orientation protections in its Constitution.

McMichael remarked, "This type of victory needs to be honored by queer organizations and activists in the United States. Why hasn't it?"

– Kim Diehl

of the twentieth century, was dismissed as an occasion for white nuns to have sex with black men on the state capitol grounds, leaving used condoms in the bushes. Viola Luizzo, the white woman from Detroit who was murdered by Klansmen driving marchers back from Montgomery, was dismissed as a whore [see "From Selma to Sorrow," *Southern Exposure*, Fall 1999].

In the years after this, as a generation of lesbians and gay men have gained our own acknowledged presence and language, I have found myself puzzled and frustrated at how the movement against homophobia and heterosexism and for gay/lesbian liberation could grow up often so seemingly separate from the movement against racism and for the

liberation of people of color.

I am puzzled, as always, by the opposition of blackness and gayness, which the Religious Right has propagated as a "wedge" strategy. Blackness signifies much more than dark skin, given the sexual history of slavery, in which any slave masters had sexual access to black women, and any offspring "followed the condition of the mother" into slavery, however light the child's skin. Passing as white under a regime of white supremacy was every bit as much a temptation and strategy as passing as straight under heterosexist regimes, and neither comes without cost.

Nor is "invisibility" only a category of gay life. Ralph Ellison begins his classic novel in my home-

town of Tuskegee, Alabama, with a metaphor I totally understand: "I am an invisible man." Racism, like homophobia, is predicated on an invisibility located not so much in the "biochemical accident of my epidermis," as Ellison's narrator explains, as "a matter of the construction of their inner eye."

Like Ellison, as a child in Tuskegee I knew there was something about me, elusive as fog, that people around me acted out of but never explained. We wondered "whether [we weren't] simply a figure in a nightmare which the sleeper tries with all his strength to destroy."

Racism in the gay community and homophobia in the black community are realities, as are the deliberately divisive tactics of the Right. But is

there also something in the category of "civil rights" that causes confusion and disjunction about the complexity of "having and being a body"? Have the praxes of our movements – their political discourse of civil rights and related strategies of legal protection – somehow hijacked us all?

CIVIL RIGHTS: LIFE, LIBERTY  
AND THE PURSUIT OF...?

It is no accident that the civil rights movement gave me ways to understand my sexuality. When I encountered it from beneath the bushes, the impact to me was revolutionary. Not that this movement was monolithic. We whites knew the differences among the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and the Black Panthers were vast. But it was all "radical" to me, because it shook my culture and my family to the root, because our racism went that deep. I left Alabama for graduate school, fleeing the racism as much as the (still unnamed) homophobia.

Second-wave feminism and moving away from home had given me the context to finally come out as a lesbian; and I learned how women's struggles grew up within, alongside, and at times in opposition to black struggles. In the early 1980s I started a "career" in political organizing. Now, in the late 1980's and '90s, were gay people like myself "hijacking" the civil rights movement?

Lesbian and gay movements from the 1970s to this day, in fact, do make claims using civil rights laws and legal concepts that emerged from anti-racist struggles. The movement against hate violence, in which I participated for much of the 1980s, offers one instance of the efforts to extend "civil rights" to include sexual orientation.

All of the federal protections, such as they were, applied to race, and none to sexual orientation. In 1983, moreover, national civil rights groups generally did not include homophobic violence in discussions of

*Although many white lesbians and gay men are subjected to employment discrimination, being born into straight families has protected us from being ghettoized as a super-exploited class over decades and generations, as had often happened with people of color.*

"hate violence." In North Carolina, we could handily document hundreds of brutal acts perpetrated against African Americans, Native Americans, Jews and gay people, as a part of building a coalition against hate violence, since fascism tends to call forth United Fronts. Violence was the bloody common thread among stigmatized identities.

Gay civil rights strategies have moved more successfully at the municipal level, where many cities passed ordinances including gay people as a "protected class." It was these successes that the Right targeted in a series of ballot initiatives pioneered in such places as Oregon and Colorado, with the arguments that gayness was a "behavior-based lifestyle" and thus any rights we might gain were "special rights," with the implication that all gays had class privilege.

Pressing myself to understand how anti-racist advances became available to anti-homophobic struggles, in 1994 I bought two textbooks on Constitutional Law and read the rights sections. Right-wing

propagandists argued that gay people have "hijacked" the civil rights movement, but I saw how the particular struggles of African Americans that resulted in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments have repeatedly resulted in extending legal concepts far beyond the African-American community to other groups. The Supreme Court's decision in *Romer v. Evans* (1996) finally acknowledged the Fourteenth Amendment rights of lesbians and gay male citizens. The Supreme Court declared that gay people are not strangers to the law.

"Equal protection" arguments on the Fourteenth Amendment can apply for lesbians and gay men to discrimination in housing and jobs and freedom from hate violence; to police brutality and political repression, all of which are also tactics used against people of color. Sodomy laws in half the states (and most Southern states) make lesbians and gay men second class citizens.

But there are also places where gay experience does not fit the historic experience of the African-American community about which much of the civil rights language emerged. Visible lesbian and gay communities and political movements are fairly recent developments in the United States. Although many white lesbians and gay men are subjected to employment discrimination, being born into straight families has protected us from being ghettoized as a super-exploited class over decades and generations, as had often happened with people of color. Consequently, there is less of a case, in my opinion, for affirmative action for gay people.

Gay people likewise did not need the Fifteenth Amendment's protection of voting, since gay people as such have never been legally prohibited from voting although lesbians as women have and lesbian and gay African Americans and Native Americans have as people of color.

But not coming from contexts of struggle, many middle-class white gay people did not realize how con-

tested these civil rights discourses were, or how fragile were the gains to people of color given a virulent racist backlash and a declining economy. At the same time, legal scholars of color began to seriously challenge the reigning legal ideologies about race built in the 1960s and 1970s because they "treat the exercise of racial power as rare and aberrational rather than as systemic and ingrained" and place "virtually the entire range of everyday social practice in America" beyond the reach of the law.

Civil rights is also a limited paradigm for social transformation, for gay people as for other oppressed people. The limits of "civil rights" are the limits of classic nineteenth century liberalism. Rights belong to the basic social unit of the individual, not to "groups." This view of human nature accompanied the rise of capitalism, with individual as consumer or as worker in competition for jobs. An individual's motivation was to get as large a share as possible of available resources, maximizing self-interest. Such a competitive and isolated self will inevitably be miserable and looking for people to blame.

No wonder, then, that such a philosophical tradition, encoded in civil rights law, can not comprehend or address the processes whereby groups are systematically privileged or oppressed. No wonder that the demand for "group rights," as in aggressive affirmative action, has been so denounced by liberals and conservatives alike. It is the individualism of this tradition that enables the Right to condemn gay and lesbian sexuality as individual choice, the repercussions of which are thereby beyond the scope of civil rights protection.

The rights framework also requires us to prove our belonging by proving our victimhood. We gain "strict judicial scrutiny" in Fourteenth Amendment cases by establishing ourselves as a "special [discriminated] class." Many gay people respond by clamoring to prove we are

*Perhaps those street  
queers in Piedmont  
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communities.*

a "real [read: persecuted] minority," distracting us from rights held as the preserve of the "majority," variously constituted as white, male, propertied, and straight. With these victim arguments, we could persuade a good many people that we should not be mutilated, tortured, or brutally attacked, barely asserting our right to life. Liberty and the pursuit of happiness, which in Biblical terms some of my friends call "fullness of life," are quite another matter.

*HISTORICAL MATERIALISM... BUT  
WHAT ABOUT THE ORGANISM?*

Historical materialism is a second major paradigm for bringing together race, class, gender and sexuality in the United States. What are the possibilities that an understanding of sexuality brings to transformative movements based in class?

In 1992, I began working for the Urban-Rural Mission (URM) of the World Council of Churches, a program that brings together community organizers, liberation theologians and activists from the church to forward transformational organizing in local contexts all over the world. I got a crash course in the economy, a view of shifting economic terrain in what is being called "globalization."

In 1992 I attended a special gathering of the Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network, a "sister" organization to the URM. It had as its theme

"Building Just Relationships for the Next 500 Years" as part of the Quincentenary. As far as I could tell, I was the only out homosexual in sight. I faced a nagging question: How does the lesbian part of me fit in? How does homophobia intersect with these issues of gross capitalist exploitation? "What," I pondered, "is a dyke to think about NAFTA?"

The answer took on words in a conversation with a man named "Sarge," a 50-year-old Black man who organizes the homeless in Atlanta. During a break, he sang a song about all the "mean things" down here on earth, like homelessness, crime – and women wanting to be men, men powdering their noses, and similar "abominations." As the succeeding verses sank in, my palms began to sweat and my heart began to pound. I considered jumping up to interrupt him, or stomping or slipping out of the room. I decided, instead, to try to open a dialogue.

First, I approached the singer privately and shared with him my thoughts and reactions. He ex-



plained, among other things, that the song had been inspired by the presence of a good many gay street people in Atlanta's Piedmont Park, many of whom he said (and I believe him) were his friends. Then, working with the conference planners, we carried this discussion into the larger group, where I began to clarify for myself the questions I had framed earlier. It was a moment of deepened articulation in my emerging queer socialism.

What I said went something like this:

First off, given the forces we are up against, who decides to powder his nose is pretty inconsequential.

Second, in some cultures, the male and female principles are not so at war as they are in this culture, and people like the berdache in American Indian societies were considered holy people. Perhaps those street queers in Piedmont Park are our holy people, cast out by both black and gay communities.

Anyway, if most women acted like women are supposed to act, we would be completely passive, just lay down and die.

Next, people of color have suffered for 500 years from the European/Christian war between mind and body, soul and body, projected onto cultures that often had more holistic world-views. The same mind/body split that led the 100 white men owning poultry plants in Mississippi to tell the workers "we only want your bodies, not your minds" also defines gay men and lesbians in this period as only perverse bodies engaged in sinful/sick/illegal physical acts, as "abomination."

We gay people know that we humans are not only "means of production," however much capitalism seeks to define us that way. Our needs include not only the survival needs of food, shelter, health care and clothing, but also dignity, pleasure, intimacy and love. But all gay men and lesbians also need to understand more clearly (as some of us do)

*This is the very old way of love, and it calls us to find new paths. Many of us are reaching for new connections and new ways to explain them.*

how we are also workers, means of production: we need to see how, in the same way we are defined by an obsession with our bodies and our sexuality, black women in Mississippi poultry plants and Mexican women in *maquilas* are also defined as only bodies, to be used and discarded, machines without feelings and souls. We need to understand more fully how our fates are implicated in theirs in order to deepen our own political vision and the possibilities of our own eventual freedom.

HOW CAN I MAKE—OR REMOVED—  
CERTAIN SPACE?

I began to see what we have been taught to think of as "private" (as in "private sphere," or "private property") is not private at all, in the sense of being isolated and individualized, but more "intimate," the ground on which genuine transformation, community and relationship occur. There is nothing private about multinational control. There is nothing intimate about the drive for profit. What people long for is not privacy, but intimacy; not individualism, but the freedom to be their peculiar (queer) selves and be in community. Sexuality is key in both processes.

The brilliant lesbian African-Caribbean poet and activist Audre Lorde explained the power of sexual being, and the stakes of incorporating the power of the erotic in our political

practice. In her essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," she explained:

"The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For once having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves."

We are in a period of global reorganization. For some, the principle is maximizing profits and power. For others, it is using this most recent crisis to reach, once again, for more just human arrangements, "an association in which the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all," and this development assumes our sustainable participation in the natural world, our kinship with the animals and plants, the minerals and water and air; with all the whirling molecules. This is the very old way of love, and it calls us to find new paths. Many of us are reaching for new connections and new ways to explain them.

Desire, Audre Lorde teaches us, is after all desire for something or someone; and the ability for people to experience autonomous sexual desire is linked to our ability to desire health, decent jobs, safe neighborhoods, all the things we consider fullness of life. Before we can get what we want, we have to know what we want: to feel it physically: the desire for another person ... for justice ... for God; perhaps, after all, they are all the same longing.

**S**

Mab Segrest is a writer, teacher, and organizer who lives in Durham, NC. She has written two books, *My Mama's Dead Squirrel* and *Memoir of a Race Traitor*. She is working on a third, *Born to Belonging*. This is excerpted from an essay that appeared originally in *Neither Separate Nor Equal: Race, Class and Gender in the South*, edited by Barbara Smith (Philadelphia: Temple, 1999).

# So, I hear you're a lesbian



*An Inter-Generational  
Dialogue With Two  
Southern Freedom Fighters*

**By Kim Diehl**



One of the most important aspects of the dialogue for justice is the conversation between generations. Movements have a history of building on each other – consciously or unconsciously, and not always in a straight line. Below is a dialogue between two of the South's leading organizers and activists, and friends of Southern Exposure. John O'Neal – known in the pages of SE as "Junebug," the story-teller – is a veteran of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, the Free Southern Theater, and other efforts to link artistic expression with social change from his base in New Orleans. Wendi O'Neal, John's daughter, has a long activist history in her own right. She was co-founder of AFREKETE at Spellman College, and is now based at the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee. SE guest editor Kim Diehl talked with the O'Neals about identities, movements, and their connections between the generations.

**Wendi:** When I realized I was a lesbian, I came out totally by accident. I was speaking at an Audre Lorde panel discussion and I found myself saying I was a lesbian. So things snowballed from there. I thought, "Well, maybe I'm a bisexual-identified lesbian." You know, I really didn't know.

My dad was the last person I came

out to, although that's kind of awkward because he actually sat me down and said, "So, I hear you're a lesbian." I still don't really know what all that's about. I think of you, Daddy, as quite the teacher and I felt like I didn't quite know how you were going to respond to that. I had a lot of fear around the idea that I could be rejected.

**John:** You really had fear around that?

**Wendi:** Yeah, I did.

**John:** At the time, Wendi's circle in Atlanta, where she was in school, coincided with much of my circle in Atlanta. And Wendi was very publicly out and people who know us both, knew she and I have a very intimate relationship – one that is a special friendship and a similar mind. Wendi thinks in the same structure and process that I do, only she tends to do it with more efficiency and more directness. We've always been able, since she was a baby, to get along real well. I might add that I had the perception she was gay from the time she was about ten or twelve years old. In fact, her mother and I talked about it.

**Wendi:** You know, Mommy said the same thing. I really didn't know.

**John:** It's a hard road to travel, in our society. I wish it were not so, but I have a lot of friends and associates who are gay and who are involved politically in various ways. They counseled on the subject with me, so I just thought all this was going to work out in time. I would not try to push Wendi along. All through high school she never really dated. She had good friends and was never bothered by the fact that she didn't date, as far as I could tell.

**Wendi:** I just thought I was a late bloomer.

**John:** Wendi had a friend who was gay and going through some difficult stuff trying to deal with his family. Wendi and I talked about it, and I was trying to give Wendi an opportunity [to come out.] Even some of my very out gay friends would go up to Wendi and say, "Anything you want to talk about?" So finally the experience that keyed it was one night Wendi's step-mother and I were at a Sweet Honey [in the Rock] concert...

**Wendi:** Oh, that was so ridiculous!

**John:** She had been in the gay newspaper the week before. Given the openness of our relationship, all of our friends just assumed it was right on with me. So someone came up and just hugged Wendi and kissed her and started talking about the newspaper article. Wendi said, "Hmmm..."

**Wendi:** I said, "I don't know what you're talking about!"

**John:** That's the only – I wouldn't say lie – *misdirection* I think I've ever suffered from Wendi. She always tells the truth, even when it hurts. I didn't know why you thought I wouldn't ever find out.

**Wendi:** I didn't think you weren't gonna find out. I just didn't want to deal with it. I still haven't really unpacked all of that. But I think it had a lot to do with how I perceive your politics.

I think of you, Dad, as a patriarch, and I think of you as having a relatively narrow view of what oppression looks like. Whenever we have conversations around oppression I really hear you using language like racism is central to an analysis. But what I hear you *mean* is racism *is* oppression. And sexism, therefore homophobia, and class – not even so much class, I really feel like you legitimize class as economic oppression – but in terms of sexism, I feel like you really talk about it as "that's

just about white women complaining" instead of linking behavior, power, and domination.

**John:** We might add that Wendi and her mother and most of her friends frequently team up on me with these arguments...

**Wendi:** (Laughter) You see how he talks about this!?

**John:** ...and have been responsible to a large extent for my heightened sensitivity about gender issues.

**Wendi:** Did you hear him say, "sensitivity?"

**John:** I'm gonna tell you what I think, now. So I give you credit for a large part of my thinking on this stuff ... I would say, philosophically, that I am an "unaffiliated Marxist." I think the fundamental motor to our social development is our class interest in all societies as long as class exists... People move based on what they need to do in order to get food, clothes, and shelter. I think race is a secondary phenomena that has primary impact in a racially-polarized world. But class is the dominating factor in human relations. The gender and other issues are contradictions within the various societies and, in my view, don't have the same overarching strategic significance that race has right now.

**Wendi:** I don't disagree with the basic premise you laid out, that we're in an economic structure and our identities are exploited to maintain the structure of power and domination. Where I differ is I don't have such precise language. I feel in my body the intersections between race, class, gender and sexuality in ways that you don't experience. And in ways that keep you blind to the particulars that are important in terms of how this stuff plays out, not just the idea but how we can challenge it. For me you represent "Race Men" ...





tion, but that's what winds up happening. So that when people bring themselves together to analyze what the problems are and try and figure out how to develop strategies to address the problem, people don't bring their full selves to the discussion. So the solidarity winds up being flimsy because we don't work through those tensions.

**John:** I agree we have to confront the points of tension that are specific to the people in the dialogue, otherwise they end up lying to each other and giving the lie to the whole dialogue. In my opinion [the depth of solidarity one can achieve is] less a function of the

analysis one brings to that discussion than it is the attitude and values one brings. But whatever your value core is, [not bringing our full selves to the table] debilitates the discussion by imposing limits to what can be talked about. Then the discussion is going to suffer.

**Wendi:** And the strategy is going to suffer. As I've experienced black people in political organizations and trying to shift political circumstances through organizing and direct action, we automatically try to jump over these conversations about where we differ.

**John:** And the result down the line is everybody ends up dissatisfied with the end result.

**Wendi:** Exactly! So in the mean time, we end up focusing on the common enemy but we haven't had any discussion about what it is we want to be building – the culture that we want to create. So I feel like I can't just do challenging homophobia work with other queer people of

color, more specifically, queer black people.

I am wanting to figure out ways to try to build stronger solidarity with people I look to as allies, and not just skip over these difficult discussions. I'm excited to work with you, Daddy, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to address some of these conflict points around sexuality. For me it's a good starting off point for having broad discussions.

**John:** I'm interested in such a dialogue for three reasons. Number one, I think we are compelled by the social and historical circumstances to come to grips with the fact that we do exist as a global economy and a global culture is evolving. If we don't do it consciously with all the people in the world and all the cultures of the world as the point of reference, we're gonna end up doing tremendous injustice. Not only do I not want to be a victim of such injustice, I don't want to be the perpetrator of such injustice on others.

The second thing, I'm particularly concerned with sexuality because of the role of *eros* in our lives – of erotic energy – which has been distorted by puritanism and the narrow sense of what is appropriate, what is good, and what is bad. Erotic energy is the center of our creative impulse and the center of the process of creativity itself. And if we don't evolve a more sophisticated and integral way of dealing with and relating to our erotic core, then our society will turn into a dry, careless thing with nothing anyone will care about it. *Eros* and beauty are two sides to one coin in my view.

Finally, erotically alive people and homosexual people have been forced by this puritanism into the status of outlaws. So that the result is we eliminate their strongest contributions to the public dialogue. **S**

**John:** I am a race man.

**Wendi:** Yes! You – or Marxists – have a great talk...

**John:** Although I think of myself as a race man, I'm more flattered by the identification as a Marxist...

**Wendi:** But then there's all this history of race men not being able to treat women in their lives with respect and dignity. And the history of struggle in the recent civil rights movement, black power movement and black nationalist movement, where people have not really internalized these tenants of justice. I agree that the way the economy is structured defines people's relationships. But what I'm trying to point out is there's also something about the way you line up this analysis that asks people to leave parts of themselves at the door.

**John:** That's not my intention.

**Wendi:** I know that's not your inten-

*Three Histories:*

*Photo by Kim James*

## *Pathways*



**By Akiba Onada-Sikwoia**

**Akiba Onada-Sikwoia blows a dijeridoo—an indigenous Australian sacred instrument used to call the ancestors— at an unmarked burial in Florida where Africans were left to die because they were unfit to sell.**

I was fourteen years old when I first recognized my life was being informed by a presence much greater than myself. This quiet realization led me to know I was here in this body, this lifetime for a reason. I would overcome obstacles, become conscious, then share what I learned with others.

Born in El Paso, Texas in 1943, I grew up, from the age of four, in Denver, Colorado. Middle of the

road and middle of the country, surrounded by Nebraska, Wyoming, Kansas, New Mexico and the most profound mountains, Denver was a place very much in denial of its impoverished black, Latino and Native communities.

My mother worked hard but in those days there were few choices of jobs available to Black women. Her two years of Junior College weren't able to bring much more than low-

level and low-paying governmental work. During the week she worked for the Air Force Finance Center. On weekends she supplemented her income by cleaning the homes of white people. I hated knowing she had little choice but to clean the homes of white people in order to feed us – day work, we called it. Why were our lives so hard? I never understood it. Why was my life so hard? A question I've visited often throughout my life.

Both my biological father and the second man she married were more interested in gambling and hustling than in the financial support for the children they fathered. My mother was left to shoulder the bulk of the responsibility for myself, my two brothers and my sister which, left her angry and trapped with very little nurturing to give us.

The oldest of four children, with the responsibility of caring for my younger siblings, my first fifteen years were a slow descent into hell. Incest, battering, alcoholism and gambling were all part of the web permeating my home. Still, my inner life was full of déjà vu's, out of body experiences, angels and deep thoughts of having been here before.

During those times I developed a fierceness for freedom and survival. I also developed insecurity and asthma. Poor grades got me on punishment for months at a time. Determined to have a life, I'd sneak out of the house, get beat and have longer punishments. At the school I was bussed to, I fought everyday. Depressed, angry, scared and abandoned by father and mother, I had no adult allies growing up.

Both my mother's parents were dead by the time she was six. My paternal Grandmother lived in Kansas City, Missouri. I would get to visit her during the summers but after the age of ten that changed. My Grandmother was the only adult whom I felt gave me unconditional love but she never knew what went on in my house.

I was fifteen when my power emerged. I "came out," and hit my mother back. She was my batterer, her husband was hers. Strange how events occurred for me then. I had my vision at fourteen and at fifteen, I took my power. "Coming out," was such an act of empowerment for me. I have struggled since to be out in all places.

Healing from my childhood and the tendency to project those wounds onto subsequent relation-

*Not only did I not love my self, I realized, I didn't even understand the concept.*

ships and all else I encounter has been a life long journey. Even though I had a vision at fourteen (and several others afterwards) it was often hard to accept the truth of those visions within the context of my life.

In my early twenties I was a wild, wounded woman – experimenting with everything, including every drug – attempting to capture my missing childhood with the freedom to choose. No longer required to be mom to my brothers and sister, no longer available for abuse – I pushed life to the very edge. Sometimes hidden within the harshest of experiences, I could sense Spirit grabbing my attention but the pain of the experience would often confuse the message. A clear thread permeating my life then was the deep feeling of just not being enough. There was always something wrong. Still, somewhere inside I believed I could do anything.

By the age of twenty-six I was living in Los Angeles, studying Metaphysics and attending Science of Mind Church on Sundays. I was also using a number of drugs everyday. On one of those days I started reading a book, *Think and Grow Rich*, recommended by a Science of Mind Practitioner, as a way for me to address, what I thought were, my "abundance issues." The very first page read, "One of the hardest things for people to do is to love themselves." I closed the book. I still remember the absolute hopelessness I felt in those moments. Loving myself was beyond comprehension. Not only did I not love my self, I realized, I didn't even understand the concept.

This new truth – and the not knowing of how to grasp it – caused me to

feel trapped. If I had to love me in order to have money, a good relationship, a good life, I would never make it. I was doomed – like all of my life, it was just too hard, too much work. I felt as though I were riding a roller coaster, at top speed, through a tunnel. I couldn't stop, get off or turn around. I couldn't see where I was headed; all I had was my past. My life was a mess. Relationships totally out of balance. I detested my job, used drugs everyday and was suicidal. I was seeing a therapist – white and male, he never knew how to help me. He asked many questions but was unable to help me create solutions, other than tranquilizers.

I'd always ask my Self, what about the visions I had? Where is God? Maybe I made them up ... if I had to love myself. What about my pain, what about my rage and all of the things I'd done that I was ashamed of? What about my mother?

This is when I suffered a nervous breakdown and had to figure out how to heal myself. No one in my community was much able to support me – they were as "out there" as I was. I had to create my own healing. First I had to rescue my mind because I was losing it.

I tried to get my mother to help me by acknowledging how she'd battered me; instead she blamed me. I wanted to die; I needed help to live. I had to see how wounded I was.

Step by step, I learned how to heal myself. It was at this time I found meditation, the beginning of a life-long process of healing. This was my life thirty-two years ago. I've climbed mountains, soared plateaus and crossed many rivers since the day I felt my mind slipping away. The day I sat singing a song to my self about numbers – 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 – over and over until form came and my mind returned back home.

Through meditation I began to find the way back to my Self, the quiet voice, I used to hear as a young person. The voice which told me I

could do it, the voice that assured me I had a purpose for living. As I healed myself I was able to be a catalyst for the healing of others.

My concept of Spirit/God/Divine Creator has changed many times since my first vision. The most profound change came when God stopped being a "he" outside my self and became a living entity inside me. Thus, I began to feel empowered with Spirit, to love my self and to understand the roll of my ancestors. In 1980, at fifty-five, my dear mother made her transition into Spirit world. The mother who crossed over was a very different person from the mother who birthed me. I was gifted to be the one, within our family, to care for her during her transition into the Spirit world.

I fell in love with her, witnessing the process and assisting her preparation to exit this plane. Love and acceptance helped open the door for the healing of our relationship. Again, my life shifted. The healing between she and I took years, but from the other side, she gave the little girl inside me the love she'd always needed from her mother. Last year I was fifty-five. Crossing my mother's death line, I gave much thanks for my life.

My mother's death showed me the profoundness of the ancestors, which led me to the practice of Yoruba and the consideration of ancestors as guides. This in turn led me to the practice of Native American Traditions. Thus, I began to honor and claim all the bloods within, which led me to the acceptance of my Irish ancestors. I saw this acceptance of all my ancestors as an acceptance of my whole self.

My African ancestors taught me to honor the ancestors as they live within me. My Native ancestors taught me to honor the earth and all of her relations for they too live within me. One of my Great, Great Grandmother's was Irish. She has come through to me as a guide and a warrior. This way has helped me to

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heal from the shame of the parts of me that I didn't like. I am so blessed.

In September, 1998, I was able to participate in the Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage. A year-long journey, beginning May 31, 1998, the pilgrimage retraced the triangular slave trade from Leverett, Massachusetts, all the way to South Africa. A walking prayer, this journey was envisioned, by Sister Claire Carter and Ingrid Askew, to address racism through healing the legacy of slavery – reverse patterns by going backwards. Many of us needed to take the Spirits of our enslaved Ancestors back home. We prayed to acknowledge the enormous price people of the African Diaspora have and still are paying for freedom. We came together, from all over the world, to honor, witness and give voice to the Diaspora of Africans who suffered the unspeakable cruelties of slavery, before, during, and after the Middle Passage. We walked together as diverse people healing. It was hard, but most of us found love and compassion for one another. We were the world trying to heal the world.

Through this process, again I was reminded of the enormous power of the Ancestors/Spirit for time after time, as we were willing to heal our-

selves, they opened doors unattainable by us alone. On this journey of grief and greed, the importance of living one's truth became crystallized within me. Had those before us lived their truth, perhaps this most devastating crime against all of humanity might not have occurred. On this journey I was able to heal the shame I'd held regarding the enslavement of my Ancestors. I came to celebrate the enormous gift of courage and determination given to me by my people. As we walked back through the doors of no return, in the "Slave Castles" along the coast of West Africa, my shame transformed into dignity and the slavery within my Self was healed.

The opportunity to walk upon the Earth, day after day, allowed me to listen to *she* who has bore witness to and suffered from the torture of so many of her children. I experienced immense joy to be able to touch her depth and see her beauty, in so many different locations, with the intention to give her a tiny grain of the compassion she has given. Profoundly I felt the suffering and love of those gone on before me. In the places where people were giving love and caring to the Earth and themselves, I felt abundance. In the areas where people were full of hate and anger, I felt her sadness. So incredible it was, to be with people, unknown to me before, focused on healing so intently. It was in Benin, West Africa, while walking when I finally knew everything is God and we are One.

Aho, Mitakuye Oyasin

Aché

*Akiba Onada-Sikwoia is a Black Two-spirited Woman of African, Native American and Scottish/Irish ancestry. Self-taught, her path as healer takes many forms. For four years she was publisher and editor of Sinister Wisdom, the longest surviving International lesbian literary publication. She is writer, storyteller, workshop facilitator, counselor, pipe carrier and Sundancer often serving as spiritual advisor. Presently she lives in Durham, NC where she has been developing herself as a polarity therapist, making art and envisioning tours to sacred sites for people of the African Diaspora.*

## Three Hirstories:

# Ivory Black

As a child, I looked for meaning in the world by consulting with and listening to adults. I rarely had to ask for clarification. It was spelled out for me since I liked to be in grown folks' business and hang out in the kitchen.

For many Southern African-American women, the kitchen represents comfort, nourishment and community. A safe haven of sorts, it's a place to speak your mind on the things happening in the world, as well as experience the wonder of creation. However, there is a side to the kitchen where opinions and gossip become sessions for self-hatred. Perhaps this is why we get nervous when it is time to straighten the hair by the nape of the neck, referred to as the "kitchen." You never know when you're gonna get burned.

It was in my grandmother's kitchen that I began to see myself in my aunts, my grandmother, my mother, my great aunts, and cousins on Sunday afternoons after morning worship. They spoke about the community, schools, politicians, soap operas, history, family and family secrets. However, I sensed changes in the vibration of the kitchen when one of the biggest secrets was discussed: a queer relative.

The preferred term was "those people." Occasionally dyke and faggot would pierce the air of the room. In the 80's when the AIDS virus became a "plague", one of my aunts said that they should take all "those people" and put "them" on an island to die.

The worst was when they would talk about one of my mother's cousins. I could feel the fear and hatred in

their voices. It made me uncomfortable and afraid. They said being gay was the worst thing a person could ever be and cited it as a sexual, psychological, and emotional deformity. They said it was a choice. They said that the woman just had low self-esteem and couldn't get a real man. They then would say that someone "like that" could forget about making it into heaven. I wanted to go to heaven and these were the people I thought knew how to get there.

Since I did not want to be the cousin they whispered about in the kitchen, I repeated their hurtful words and I began to verbally assault myself and those like me.

My world tumbled down one spring afternoon in the 6th grade. I had just finished talking to my best friend, and as she walked away after our discussion, I found myself watching her. She had on a denim skirt, the kind that snapped a long way up the back. As she sashayed down the hall I was in a freeze-frame-slow-motion-kind-a-view.

I watched her hips sway as her bootie rocked from side to side, and just as I was about to smile to myself I hear, "YOU'RE GAY, YOU'RE LOOKIN' AT HER BUTT!" It was a boy from my class. Immediately, I gathered my composure, and in my best, best-girlfriend voice, I called to my girl to snap her skirt one more time.

By addressing her skirt's buttons instead of him, I made it seem like I was protecting her from all the "fast boys," the ones who'd be looking at her bootie as she walked down the hall. At that moment I had to face the reality that I might just could be queer.

It did not help that I was overweight and a bookworm. My self-image and feelings about myself were shaped by conversations in my relative's kitchens. I believed because I was fat I was not beautiful. I felt I was not beautiful because I was not attractive to boys my age. I built a wall around myself.

My self-esteem was not any better in college. I used sex as a crutch to support my all too fragile self-image. I was still overweight and thought as long as I was attractive enough to boys and girls that I was okay. Unfortunately, sex did not heal the void I felt inside myself. I was looking for love everywhere but inside. As a queer in this society, I am realizing that a positive image of self is instrumental to personal health and well being. I say this because I feel that my self image as a sexual minority was shaped for me even before I knew who I was.

I no longer look to others to validate my existence in this world. I'm putting my trust in the One who created all things. If S/he decided to tweak the genetic pool a bit and make a me, I should build my relationship with Hir<sup>1</sup>. It's liberating to know I have nothing to fear, and I'm okay being queer.

§

*Ivory Black started writing when she was 10 years old. It's been a way to center herself and stay in touch with who she is. She also enjoys writing poetry and sharing it with others. She currently lives in Washington, DC trying to live her dreams with no fear.*

<sup>1</sup>A non-specific, all-inclusive genderless term found on the SMYAL—Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League—web page [www.smyal.org](http://www.smyal.org).

*Three Histories:*

# To Those Who Have Come Before Me

By **Jurina Vazquez**



**I**t wasn't until my Grandmother passed away ten years ago that I really opened myself to understanding and knowing myself and developing my spirituality. It took her passing into the Spirit world to heal the stored pain that had accumulated for so many years of my life. Being a woman, a woman of color, and a woman who loves women, hasn't always been easy, but my ancestors paved the way through their struggles and pain.

I am grateful to them for creating and manifesting the pathway so that I can move forward. I give thanks to the women before me who refused to be conquered. I am not a woman who has to be in the kitchen, domesticated day and night. I am not a woman who fears or runs from slavery. I am not a woman who has to be forced to love a man when I want to love a woman.

I am Judy, the birth name my Father gave me, Jurina, the name my Grandmother gave me, which means Pure Spirit, and Cedar Woman, she who works with cedar, sage and other herbal medicines. I am White Shell Woman, which was given to me by my adopted Lakota Family because my ancestors are Caribbean Indians who are a peaceful, loving and pow-

erful nation, like the ocean. I am also Braveheart, which was given to me by my sister, Akiba, because she says that I walk into the unknown with an open heart to see what the universe unfolds for me.

My grandmother is my father's mother. Her name is Carmen Maria Ramos Vazquez and she taught me about unconditional love. She also taught me about strength, particularly how to be a strong woman. She was a matriarch and she stood up for her rights as a Puerto Rican woman. Matriarchy in Puerto Rico is rare, but she didn't let anyone rule her, not even her husband or her three sons.

She was a short, round, bow-legged woman, and almost looked like a shaman with Indian features, white hair and strong arms. She worked in the house and grew roses. She tended and nourished them so beautifully – just as well as the people she touched in her life. Even

when she was stern we knew it was coming from a place of love. She nourished us by giving us reasons for her sternness and we learned quickly – it was for our protection. I never had a need to come out to her – she always knew – because I always brought my partners over and she was very loving and accepting of them. She never asked me about boyfriends, like many Puerto Rican grandmothers would.

My grandmother also taught me how to protect myself. Our relationship deepened when she found out a family member abused me. When I was seven she kicked his ass in front of me and knocked him over – he was twice her size. That's when I knew women could do anything and size didn't matter. From that point on, I knew no one was ever going to fuck with me.

When my grandmother was a child, her family couldn't afford to

send her to school so she sat outside the school and listened through the window using rocks as pens and the ground as her paper. Later, I would teach her how to read and write in English. Every day after I came home from school, she asked me what I learned that day. I taught her whatever I learned.

She was an eager self-learner and she had a lot of confidence in herself. When she walked through the pueblo, her head was raised with integrity and dignity. She gained so much respect of the people in the pueblo they asked her to be mayor. She said no, she had a family to raise and take care of. When she died, three funeral parlors fought to be the one to do the funeral. Not because of the money, because they were willing to do it free, but because Carmen Maria Ramos Vazquez passed. She died on the fourth of July, and I say she went out with a bang.

Even though we lived miles apart when I was older, I felt protected by her presence knowing she was on the planet. When she passed, I freaked out. I was lost and very afraid. My grandmother, the strong matriarchal woman who had taught me about unconditional love and strength, was gone. I had to quit both my jobs and I could not sleep or eat. Her death was very sudden. She was diabetic, had an attack and went to the hospital. She passed, but our family does not have many details and we still want to investigate it.

In that year, I discovered Sundance. I was going to pray for my Grandmother because we had just discovered her diabetes. Sundance is a ceremony that takes place in the summer time, and we pray to the sun for life's continuation on the planet earth. People go to Sundance for many things. It is a ceremony for renewal, healing, and abundance to celebrate the Sun's energy, which gives life to everything on planet earth. Some go to dance for themselves, or a loved one, or their nations, or the earth.

The day I was supposed to go to Sundance, my car was packed and I was ready to leave after work. I had been trying to go to it for three years, but I always created something to prevent myself from going; it was really big and I knew it. I went home and I heard a message from my brother on my answering machine. We spoke and he said she passed. I went to Puerto Rico and word got to the chief of the Sundance that I was not attending because of my grandmother. After the dance, she made her way to my home in Santa Fe and found me. There was an instant connection – I was miserable and needed healing. She took me into the sweat lodge and that's when my healing began.

The next year I prepared to be a Sundancer so I could dance for my Grandmother. There I met Charlene O'Rourke, who adopted me and taught me the ways of the Lakota people. As I learned the Lakota ways, I also started to connect to the roots of my people. I began to realize how similar our nations were and how much suffering our nations (Caribbean Indian, Native American and African people) had gone through. And as I started to learn more about my ancestry, my Grandmother's spirit began to come to me. She was letting me know that she was still with me and would begin to guide me.

I developed a new relationship with myself and my grandmother in the Spirit world. The more I connected, the more intrigued I became with my own spirituality. Before my spirituality deepened, I identified as a lesbian and woman of color and accepted that within myself, but as I began a process of healing, I developed a broader understanding of why I am a woman of color and a woman who loves women.

When I decided to be in and walk in my total truth as a lesbian and woman of color my Spirit grew. I began to feel so whole and complete that even my family members who had issues and concerns with my life

opened up to being more peaceful, loving, and complete with me. I thought to myself, "What did I do differently to make them turn that leaf?" I knew the answer. I stood in my truth.

I have learned much these past ten years – have read much, have researched plenty, and it is still endless. I know it really doesn't matter what religion I have chosen for myself, for religion is only a tool to assist me in reaching my highest self, my truest self, my spiritual self. I have learned it takes bravery to heal. What motivates me is my desire to heal from all of the pain that I have been carrying and weighing me down – preventing me from being light, loving and free.

My spirituality is my connection to Mother Earth, Father Sky, Grandmother Moon, Grandfather Sun, Brother Wind and Sister Water. My spirituality is my connection with the four-leggeds, winged ones, finned ones, and creepy crawlers. It is my connection with the songs of my ancestors, with all of my sisters who are in similar pathways and walkways, with all my brothers who are the left and right, yin and yang, with all the children who keep me light, make me laugh, bring happiness and joy and remind me of my innocence, with all the elders who bring me ancientness, tradition, stories, and wisdom into my life.

I can only be whole and complete in my Spirit when I am in my total truth. It is being impeccable with my word, always doing my best, never making assumptions, never taking anything personally, forgiving myself, and loving myself. My spirituality is an energy that creates my life force which balances my mind, my body and my Spirit.

*Jurina Vazquez is Borinqueña. Through the process of healing herself, she discovered her need to be balanced with the Mother Earth. Currently, she is an independent Nutrition Consultant blending both worlds of health through mind, body, spirit. She lives in Durham, North Carolina.*

# Spinning Out Freedom

I was inspired to create this poem when I first found out that the aryan nation has appropriated the powerful and medicinal indigenous symbol of the spider web, which is known to be a symbol of connection to all living things. Each know of the web the aryan mem-

bers draw on their forearm symbolizes a person of different ethnicity or religious faith they have harassed and/or killed. This poem is a prayer to recall and return the power of the web and its tradition to our own path for justice and freedom for many-gendered/many-sexualities/many-spirited peoples.

We are the web of  
life and light.  
Of all things connected /and unspun.  
Like silken dreams we become  
an unread map of our ancestors.  
Layed out in constellations/  
we find our way home.

We are the center  
of something  
that remains to be seen,  
yet is already imagined.  
Slings and whizzing,  
whipping and spinning  
out righteousness  
and freedom  
off of our tongues.

Our web spins outward to galaxies  
spreading a grid of possibility  
and incantations/that speak  
of revolutionary dreams  
unspun.

We are pulled taut  
from our own  
fears and inhibitions/ cocooning  
what has been built against us  
and uncovering a new  
landscape.

Our web catches the faces of  
deceit and violence,  
discrimination and fear.  
Where cloth has been unfolded,  
like cotton bags  
wreaking memories  
of slavery,  
they are replaced with burlap bags  
or migrant workers  
in coffee fields and factories.  
We are part of the same  
global economy  
that threatens to cocoon  
our/selves.

We spin out threads of  
global consciousness  
to undo the patterns  
of these colonialist mindgames.

We are warriors  
spinning light.  
Standing on pillars of strength.  
Or women loving women.  
Of men loving men.  
Pushing further out  
into galaxies that have  
been built by our  
struggles against injustices.

Wrapping ourselves  
in webs of genders/and sexualities.  
Swinging from woven nets  
that hold and gather  
our many Transatlantic and  
Transsexual stories of breath,  
body/  
mind/  
and memory.

We spin out freedom.

We are,  
warriors of light  
to freedom.  
We JUMP/  
for revolution.

Our feet have changed.  
Our minds have changed.  
Our spirits are hungry.  
Our path is still.  
Our vision is steadfast.  
Our legacy is long,  
And forthright.

We are at the center of  
a legacy,  
a psalm for justice,  
a map for freedom.

—Cara Page

*Cara Page is a lesbian performance poet and visual artist/activist of African/Seminole/Polish/Czechoslovakian descent in Durham, NC. Through her own cultural work she seeks to create spaces of healing and empowerment through the arts.*



## Resources



*All organizations are general lesbian, gay, trans, or bi unless otherwise noted.*

### SOUTHERN

**Alabama Gay and Lesbian Alliance**  
PO Box 36784, Birmingham AL 35224  
(205) 425-2286 (205) 985-5609 W  
glaa1@aol.com

**Alliance for Full Acceptance**  
PO Box 22088, Charleston, SC 29413  
(843) 883-0343  
www.affa-sc.org

**BiNet USA**  
4201 Wilson Blvd. #110-311  
Arlington, VA 22203  
(202) 986-7186  
www.binetusa.org

**Brotha's and Sista's**  
2224 Main Street, Little Rock, AR 72206  
Brothasandsistas@africana.com

**Equality Florida**  
1222 South Dale Mabry Suite 652  
Tampa, FL 33629  
(813) 253-5962  
www.eqfl.org

**Project FFREE**  
(Fighting for Freedom Requires  
Everyone's Energy)  
272-L Pineroft Dr., Taylor, SC 29687  
(864) 322-5488  
scchicana@aol.com

**Kentucky Fairness Alliance**  
PO Box 1523, Frankfort, KY 40201  
(502)897-1973

**Kentucky Fairness Campaign**  
PO Box 3431, Louisville, KY 40201

**Lesbian Health Resource Center**  
138 E. Chapel Hill St., Suite C11  
Durham, NC 27701

**Mississippi Gay and Lesbian Alliance**  
PO Box 8342, Jackson, MS 39284  
(601) 371-3019

**Camp Sister Spirit**  
PO Box 12, Ovett, MS 39464  
(601) 344-1411  
www.rainbowpriderv.net/css

**Men of Color**  
PO Box 57694, New Orleans, LA 70157  
(504) 482-5341

**Equality North Carolina**  
PO Box 28768, Raleigh, NC 27611  
(919) 829-0343  
www.equalitync.org

**NC Lambda Youth Network**  
115 Market St., Durham, NC 27701  
(919) 683-3037

**Georgian Equality Project**  
PO Box 78351, Atlanta, GA 30357-2351  
(404) 872-3600  
www.gep.org

**OutCharlotte**  
PO Box 32062, Charlotte, NC 28232-2062  
(704) 563 2699  
www.outcharlotte.org

**Southerners on New Ground (SONG)**  
PO Box 3912, Louisville, KY 40201  
(502) 896-2070; or  
1447 Peachtree St., NE  
Atlanta, GA 30309  
(404) 249-1451

**Save Dade**  
1521 Alton Road #163, Miami, FL 33139  
(305) 751-SAVE  
www.savedade.org

**Time Out Youth**  
1900 The Plaza, Charlotte, NC 28205  
(704) 334-8335  
www.timeoutyouth.com

**Transgendered Officers—Protect and Serve**  
3210 Tom Matthews Rd  
Lakeland, FL 33809  
(813) 752-9226

**Ororo-Crossroads**  
3375 Southern #10  
Memphis, TN 3811

**Virginians for Justice**  
PO Box 342, Richmond VA 23218-0342  
(804) 643-4816  
http://commercial.visi.net/vj/

**Youth Pride, Inc.**  
1394 McLendon Ave., Decatur, GA 30033  
(404) 223-6789  
asha@youthpride.org

**Zami**  
PO Box 2502, Decatur, Georgia 30031  
(404) 370-0920  
ATLZAMI@aol.com

### NATIONAL

**The American Boyz**  
(female to male support group)  
212A S. Bridge Street, Suite 131  
Elkton, MD 21921  
(410) 392-3640  
www.Amboyz.org

**Collective Lesbians of African Descent  
Voices Everywhere (CLOAVE)**  
PO Box 1142, Washington, DC 20003  
(202) 544-9298

**Intersex Society of North America**  
PO Box 31791, San Francisco, CA 94131  
(415)575-3885  
www.isna.org

**It's Time America!**  
(Transgender policy org)  
PO Box 65, Kensington, MD 20895  
(301) 949-3822  
www.gender.org

**National Black Lesbian and Gay Lead-  
ership Forum**  
1612 K. St., Suite 500 NW  
Washington, DC 20006  
www.nblglf.org

**National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**  
1700 Kalorama Road, NW  
Washington, DC 20009  
(202) 332-6483  
www.nglftf.org

**National Latino/a Lesbian, Gay, Bi-  
sexual and Transgender Organization**  
1612 K. St., Suite 500 NW  
Washington, DC 20006  
(202) 466-8240  
www.llego.org

**Sexual Minority Youth Assistance  
League (SMYAL)**  
410 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SE  
Washington, DC 20003 (888)-SAFE-724  
www.smyal.org

# Life After a Jim Crow Moment

*How far has Little Rock moved beyond its past?*

**A Life is More Than a Moment: The Desegregation of Little Rock Central High School**  
Will Counts. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

The cover of Will Counts' book displays a painfully familiar image: black student Elizabeth Eckford walks away from Little Rock Central High School, followed by a crowd of taunting, angry white students. Photojournalist Counts shot that photograph, drawing national and international attention to the 1957 "Crisis at Central High."

When Counts returned to Central in 1997, he saw a school that was thriving academically and socially, a school where both black and white students had a fair shot at being elected to the Homecoming Court, serving in student government, or attending an Ivy League college.

In *A Life is More Than a Moment*, Will Counts sets out to show that the life of Little Rock Central continued far beyond the tragic moments of 1957. For Counts, the story of Little Rock Central High is a story of redemption.

A closer examination, however, reveals that Central is neither a failure of integration nor a glowing victory. It is a complex institution in which academically gifted students (whether black or white) are given the keys to success, while students labeled as "average" still stand empty-handed in front of a locked door.

Central is notorious as the site of one of the most painful incidents in the history of American race relations. On September 3, 1957, Arkan-



sas Governor Orval Faubus instructed the National Guard to block nine black students from entering the school. After a three-week stalemate and under pressure from the federal government, Faubus removed the National Guard, and the students again tried to attend class. Local police were unable to keep order, however, and when an angry white mob attacked several journalists, the police ordered the students to leave the building.

Finally, on September 25, President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered 1,200 paratroopers from the Army's 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to accompany the students into the school. The federal troops helped calm the turbulence, and Central High was integrated. The "Little Rock crisis" remains a well known symbol of the white South's violent resistance to school integration.

Using both photographs and text, Counts compares the Central High of 1957 with the Central High of 1997. Counts (himself a Central graduate) took three quarters of the book's 107 black and white photographs while covering the crisis for the newspaper the *Arkansas Democrat*. Because his camera was smaller and his clothing

less conspicuous than that of most of the reporters (he wore a casual shirt and slacks while the other reporters sported dark suits), he was able to move freely throughout the crowd.

He shot the rest of the images forty years later, when, at the suggestion of one of his journalism students, he returned to the school to investigate the results of integration. His visit neatly coincided with the fortieth-anniversary commemoration of the crisis, during which President Bill Clinton held the school's door open for the returning "Little Rock Nine" to enter.

While Counts' picture of Elizabeth Eckford's quiet pain is seared in historical memory, *A Life is More Than a Moment* presents a more balanced perspective on the school, juxtaposing the hostility of the 1957 mob with the exuberance of 1997 crowds of students (black and white) at pep rallies, football games, and homecoming assemblies.

In addition to photographs and captions, the book includes four essays. Civil rights activist Rev. Will Campbell, who was one of several ministers who accompanied the black students to the doors of the school on September 4, 1957, introduces the book. Campbell recalls his memories of that day and reflects on race, which he labels "an aneurysm on the heart and soul of America, a

dangerous swelling on the aorta of a nation." In his essay "A Perspective of Central High," journalist Ernest Dumas recounts Central's seventy-year institutional history, highlighting the school's continued academic excellence.

Journalist Robert McCord's "An Unexpected Crisis" is a play-by-play of the events surrounding that hot September day when the Little Rock Nine were denied admittance to the school. In "Covering the Crisis" and "Back to Central High," Will Counts describes his memories of the events of 1957 as well as his experience of returning to Central in the late nineties. Together with the photographs, these essays tell the story of a remarkable school that continues to thrive despite its tainted past.

Counts' photograph of Elizabeth Eckford best captured the racial hatred that swirled around the crisis at Central High. Eckford, a black student who had just been turned back from the doors of Central High by a National Guardsman, walks slowly away from the crowd. Eckford's family had no phone, so she had missed the NAACP's instructions for her to meet the other eight black students and be escorted into the school by several ministers. Her head is bent, sunglasses shade her eyes. She is wearing a brand new, freshly ironed black and white dress that she made for the occasion.

Behind her, the white crowd follows, led by student Hazel Bryan. Bryan looks like a cheerleader gone mad—her pretty face is twisted and contorted as she shouts jeers and insults at Eckford. Bryan later told Will Counts that she felt like she was "the poster child for the hate generation, trapped in the image captured in the photograph, and I knew that my life was more than that moment."

Picking up on Bryan's insight, Counts argues that while Central High remains trapped on our historical imagination as a symbol of racial hatred, in fact both the school and



**WILL COUNTS INTRODUCED ELIZABETH ECKFORD (LEFT) AND HAZEL BRYAN IN 1997 40 YEARS AFTER THEIR BITTER ENCOUNTER.**

the key players in the 1957 crisis have evolved and changed over time. His thesis revolves around the fact that Hazel Bryan and Elizabeth Eckford have achieved some degree of reconciliation. In 1963, Hazel Bryan called Elizabeth Eckford and apologized for her behavior in the Little Rock mob.

In 1997, Counts introduced the two women, and soon they were deep in conversation about their flower gardens and what dress Elizabeth would wear for a photo of the two of them in front of Little Rock Central High. In Counts' view, Eckford, Bryan, and the black and white students who currently attend Central High have reconciled and live in peaceful co-existence.

*A Life is More Than a Moment* demonstrates that despite segregationists' fears, integration has not weakened Central's academic superiority. In 1957 Central was rated one of the top 38 high schools in the United States, and in 1994 college admissions deans identified Central as one of the twenty-six public high schools that best prepare students for highly selective universities. The school has a committed cadre of black and white students, teachers, and parents. In many ways, Little Rock Central High is a desegregation success story: it boasts both academic excellence and integration.

Photo sequences of individual sto-

ries such as Elizabeth Eckford's shaming retreat from the school and reporter Alex Wilson's beating make *A Life is More Than a Moment* an enormously powerful book. It does, however, have one important weakness: Counts' misleadingly optimistic portrayal of the integration of Little Rock Central.

The book's 1997 photographs include happy images of black and white students on the cheerleading squad, in class, at Student Council meetings, at sporting events, at the prom, and at graduation. In his essay, Ernest Dumas heralds the academic opportunities that Central currently offers to students of all races. In their assessments of the school's record, however, neither Dumas nor Counts addresses the shortcomings of the tracking system, which tends to place disproportionate numbers of white students in Advanced Placement and Honors classes.

In 1997, only five of the school's twenty-three National Merit Scholarship semifinalists were non-white; this in a school whose student body is now majority African-American. Counts mentions these problems, but dismisses them. The tracking system in place at Central and at many public high schools throughout the South deserves far more consideration before a fair assessment of the success or failure of integration can be made.

I say this with some authority because I am a white 1990 graduate of Little Rock Central High. When I tell people where I went to high school, they often recall the school's tainted racial past. There is a beat in the conversation, a pause during which a look of recognition settles on their face. "You mean, you went to the Little Rock Central?" they ask incredulously. "What was it like? Is it integrated? Are race relations a problem?"

In the years I attended Central, entering sophomores studied the 1957 crisis in our English classes, giving us a heightened sense of historical

and racial consciousness. I paid special attention to race relations at my high school, noticing that my Advanced Placement classes had few black students, and that blacks and whites tended to congregate separately in the hallways and at lunch.

I am thankful for the rigorous academic training I got at Central—it has served me well in the years since. I regret, however, that many of my African-American peers were denied access to upper-level classes, starting in the Little Rock school system's early grades. In that sense, the integration project remains incomplete.

For many students of history, Central High—like other historical symbols—is frozen in time, a riveting example of militant racial confrontation. *A Life is More Than a Moment* is a refreshing reminder that Central is far more than an embarrassing paragraph in an American history textbook. Seen through Counts' eyes, Central High is a school with a strong tradition of academic excellence, a school in which integration has succeeded and the ghosts of the Little Rock Nine rarely haunt the corridors. But Counts' vision of Central is only partially accurate. Life is more than a moment: the lives of Hazel Bryan, Elizabeth Eckford, and Central High School continued well beyond the frightening images of 1957. Recent controversies over tracking and race-based busing, however, indicate that the legacy of segregation still troubles southern schools. Tears sprung to my eyes recently as I watched the Little Rock Nine receive Congressional Gold Medals in a nationally televised White House ceremony.

Victories such as these, however, should not blind us to the continued struggle for racial equity in the American educational system.

— Melynn Glusman

Melynn Glusman is a native of Little Rock, Arkansas, and a doctoral student in history at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

# Listening to Slaves

## Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About Their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Emancipation

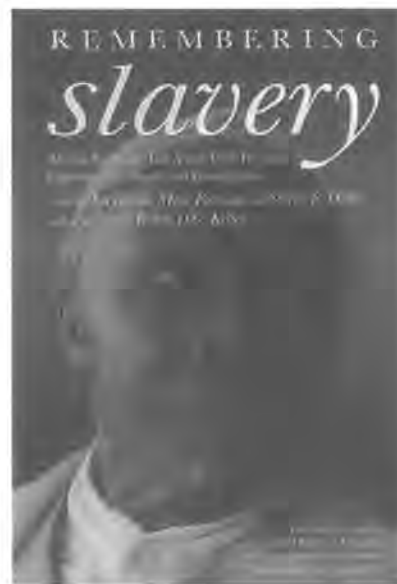
Ira Berlin, Marc Favreau, and  
Steven F. Miller (eds). New  
York: The New Press, 1998.

*"My pappy was a blacksmith. He shoe all de horses on the plantation. He wo'k so hard he hab no time to go to de fiel'. His name war Stephen Moore. Mars Jim call him Stephen Andrew. He was sold to de Moores, and his mammy too. She war brought over from Africa. She never could speak plain. All her life she been a slave. White folks never recognize 'em any more than effen dey was a dog."*

— Fannie Moore, 1937

For all the dozens of studies of slavery that have appeared in recent years, no scholar can capture the experience of being captured, bought, and sold – of being owned by another human being – as thoroughly as the words of former slaves themselves. In her pride in her father's skill and in her grandmother's heritage, and in her refusal to accept owners' definitions of her family's self-worth, their humanity and even their name, the above quoted interview with Fannie Moore provides a small sample of the testimony captured in *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Emancipation*, a book and audio tape collection published this year by the New Press in conjunction with the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institution.

These interviews are not recently available. Indeed most of them were conducted in the 1930s by the Works



Progress Administration's Federal Writers Project (FWP), and have been published before in nineteen- and twelve-volume anthologies.

What distinguishes this publication is its accessibility. A team of leading historians have selected the most interesting parts of hundreds of interviews, and Ira Berlin has written short introductions to each piece.

The interviews have been arranged in five chapters on the relationships between slaves and their owners, on work and slave life, family life, community life, and the Civil War and emancipation. The presentation is completed by period photos of interviewees, a forward by historian Robin D.G. Kelley, and an afterword by James H. Billington, the Librarian of Congress.

The most exciting part of this project is the audio tape set that accompanies the book: two sixty-minute cassettes of live recordings and dramatic renditions of some of the interviews. The only known original recordings of former slaves, these previously inaudible FWP re-

cordings have been remastered to make them available to a wider audience. They are interspersed alongside dramatic readings of other interviews by actors Debbie Allen, Clifton Davis, Louis Gossett, Jr., James Earl Jones, Jemma Jones, Melba Moore, and Esther Rolle.

Providing valuable evidence of the evolution of African-American language patterns, the original recordings also bring former slaves' experience to life in a way that only oral testimony can. Even the actors' renditions make it easier to imagine hearing these narratives when they

were first spoken in the 1930s.

Like any historical source, interviews are not perfect records of the past. The interviews in this collection were recorded sixty years after slavery ended, from elderly people who had been quite young at the time of emancipation. These memories were certainly shaped by the experiences of those sixty years, and testimony was certainly influenced by those who conducted the interviews — mostly white government employees.

Early scholars rejected slave narratives as either inaccurate or anecdotal, and until the Civil Rights

Movement rekindled interest in African American culture and history, these documents languished in the Library of Congress. Since the 1960s, narratives have "moved to the center of the study of slavery." Cautioning listeners to the inherent difficulties posed by oral history, the collection welcomes the general public to learn from valuable records once available only to professional historians.

— William P. Jones

William P. Jones is a doctoral student in history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and reviews editor for *Southern Exposure*.

# A Life Full of Blues

## The World Don't Owe Me Nothing: The Life and Times of Delta Bluesman Honeyboy Edwards

David Honeyboy Edwards, as told to Janis Martinson and Michael Robert Frank. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1997

**H**oneyboy Edwards, one of the few surviving bluesmen from the thirties, is 84 and living in Chicago. He still plays the blues, and can tell a tale, and does so here. From page one, you wish this book was on tape, to pop in the dash while driving through the Delta and on up to Chicago. Until it is, you want to read this life story with lots of old delta blues playing in the background.

The narrative follows the intertwining threads of various blues folks' life stories as they progress toward stardom, vanish into obscu-

rity or meet horrible ends. It's full of pertinent details that flesh out our feeling for the lives of the bluesmakers as real people, beyond the icons: Howlin' Wolf walking the plough, Muddy Waters trapping minks and coons.

It takes frequent note of broad themes that mattered in the communities he describes: relations with various races and classes, mixed heritage and resultant color variation, methods of fishing and hog killing. It talks of the musician's "lonesome for leaving" lifestyle: roaming, scrambling, womanizing, drinking, jumping out the back windows of jook joints, generally improvising in all things.

And of the struggles: the punishing life of sharecropping, busted levees, illnesses contracted in rough conditions, desperate men with knives. Robert Johnson poisoned, yes, but dying for lack of medical attention.

Another aspect that should serve to temper any temptation to nostalgia is the role of women. The one

who kills her battering husband is a mixed consolation for all the lives spent toiling to support their gambling, rambling menfolk. Edwards confesses (or boasts?):

*My guitar was my meal ticket but how I got by good was gambling. I had three ways of making it: the women and my guitar and the dice.*

The book could have used a bit of explanation on some points quickly glossed over, such as how there came to be descendants of the Malagasy ("Mollyglaspers") in New Orleans. But we get most of the necessities, including important comments on the development of different styles among the players in various regions, and how the blues was nestled in and nurtured by its community — an essential understanding if one wants to grapple with the changing role of the blues. It's a first-hand, first-rate account. And like the blues, it's meanings sneak up on you.

— David Lippman

Culture critic Dave Lippman lives in the Arkansas Delta.

# In Brief

## Population 1975

The Butchies

Mr. Lady Records & Video, 1999.

In their self-described tribute to queer youth, this out, all lesbian band expand on the vibrant sound of their first CD "Are We Not Femme?" (Mr. Lady Records). Combining their musical talents with a desire to validate the experiences of queer youth, "Population 1975" makes this desire seem not only worthy, nor only musically enjoyable, but politically necessary.

Whether it's the defiantly blissful "It's Over," the deep loneliness of the title track, the playfully angry protest song "More Rock More Talk," the heartache of "Eleanor," or the coyly sardonic "Movies Movies," the Butchies rock out across a range of deep feeling.

"Population 1975" combines the intense emotional charge of their songs, and the particularity of their experiences, with political mean-

ing. Their liner notes make this intention explicit: "Every time we buy a queer record, every time we write a love song...it is a revolution!" To ignore the different levels upon which their music rests, would be to ignore the exhilarating complexity of the CD.

Turn up the CD and let yourself be surrounded by strummy sounds, hard core — and metal-influenced interludes, tracks that mix quiet harmonies with drum and bass driven rhythms, or full-on punk inspired protest songs pierced through with the edgy prettiness of Kaia Wilson's vocals or the aloof coolness of Alison Martlew's back-up riffs. And did we say drums? Melissa York's drumbeats rock harder than a Def Leppard concert in the mid 80's, and mix edgily with the sweet strength of Kaia's lyrics.

Backing up their musical talent with business verve, The Butchies' record label, Mr. Lady Records and Videos is doing it for themselves! Mr. Lady sells independent records and videos from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community at low, low costs. Check out their selection of videos and music on their website [www.mrlady.com], write Mr. Lady, P.O. Box 3189, Durham, NC 27715-3189 or call for a catalog: 919-682-1150.

— Dana Seitler &  
Ada Norris

## From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun

### The House You Pass on the Way

Jacqueline Woodson. New York: Laurel-Leaf Books, 1997.



I have found in my education (and personal) work that material written well for children are often fraught with very serious social and political issues which adults can use as a point of reference for reflection and discussion.

*From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun* is a wonderful short novel of a young African-American teen-aged boy writer grappling with his mother's lesbianism and relationship with a white woman. The story is written in first person, from Melanin Sun's voice, and takes us on his journey of growth. *The House You Pass on the Way* tells the story of a young teen-



aged biracial girl struggling with her family history, her coming of age, and her burgeoning sexuality.

Both books speak directly from the young person's perspective, centering their experience. Both books are written with exquisite descriptions, bringing really vivid imagery and feeling. They are short and manageable reading for any reader, and are wonderful for read alouds as well.

What I most enjoyed is the way in which the issues at hand for the young person are made real. The characters are thoughtful and present and complex, and they know it, too. For these reasons, both of these novels are a great vehicle into discussion about issues of sexuality and race and class and gender and culture.

The other really fabulous thing is, and I don't know if Jackie Woodson does this purposely or not, but, the novels both end at a point in the conflict when the main character has come to a clearer place, but there isn't a fairy tale happy ending. We all know resolutions are hard to come by and certainly don't happen in 100 pages or less. The novels leave off at a spot prime for discussion with a group who have read this, incorporating reflection and prediction on what happens next: for the young person and for their community.

Woodson has written other short novels like these which address issues like sexual abuse, racism, class difference. I challenge activists to use literacy as a way in to placing people's lives at the center of the work, and Woodson's writing in particular is a natural fit. Book clubs are all the rage now, but social justice workers can put a new spin, a twist if you like, on the book club idea. A spin that is not only about discussion, and personal reflection, but about personal action, coalition building and community change.

— Paula Austin

Paula Austin is a Participatory Education Consultant living in Durham, NC.

## The Appalachian Reader

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# Dixie's Digital Divide

By Mary Lee Kerr

**H**elen Vinton knows that the fisher folk and farmers she works with in rural Louisiana need to learn how to use computers and the Internet, but they can't afford them and have little time to learn them.

"We think the Internet could be a useful tool and we plan to train people on computers, but many of the people we work with don't have the technology or resources yet," says Vinton, Assistant Executive Director of the Southern Mutual Self-Help Association in New Iberia, Louisiana.

Vinton's experience mirrors an uncomfortable regional trend. A technology chasm is growing between the South and the rest of the country.

In a 1998 study by the U.S. Department of Commerce on computer ownership and Internet use, the South landed at the bottom of the rankings. Of the bottom ten states for computer ownership, nine were in the South; for Internet use, eight were Southern.

Mississippi ranked last for both indicators while Virginia did the best in the region with a ranking of 12<sup>th</sup> for computer owners and 15<sup>th</sup> for Internet access.

The report also documents a growing race and class divide in technology use. White households are twice as likely to own a PC as African-American or Hispanic households. The unemployed and less-educated people surveyed were also less likely to own computers and use the Internet than those who were employed and educated.

"The 'digital divide' – the divide between those with access to new technologies and those without – is now one of America's leading economic and civil rights issues," says Larry Irving, Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information at the U.S. Department of Commerce, in his introduction to the department's report.

Access is becoming more and more significant for success in life and work, according to Irving: "Access to information resources will be increasingly critical to finding a job, contacting colleagues, taking courses, researching products, or finding public information."

To address inequalities in access, the Commerce Department organized a Digital Divide Summit to discuss strategies for providing more computer access to underserved populations.

The inequalities are not news to most groups working in the South; the question is how to change them. Many

## PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH HOME INTERNET ACCESS



Southern groups are trying to figure out concrete ways of doing basic computer training for themselves and the people they work with by applying for technology grants from foundations, forming technology committees, hiring staff members who know computers, and generally working to make technology a priority.

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, a statewide group made up of 12 chapters of community volunteers who work on issues like clean water, land reform, and economic development, has initiated a "technology plan" to address the issue of access.

According to Teri Blanton, one of KFTC's volunteer leaders, the group is looking into upgrading computer skills for its staff and committees, developing a website and doing computer trainings for their communities.

Still, there are roadblocks to moving forward. "With so many pressing and important issues to work on, it's hard to find time for computer training," says Blanton. "We're still fighting for someone to have a drink of clean water come out of their faucet."

But the benefits are worth extra effort, she says. Citizens will be able to educate themselves on any subject they want via Internet. With computer and Internet access, KFTC chapters across the state will be able to communicate quickly, exchanging information, sharing strategies, and calling for support.

"The main thing," says Blanton, "is to make sure no one is excluded. We don't want anyone to be left behind."

SE

Mary Lee Kerr writes "Still the South" from Carrboro, North Carolina.



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