

# SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

A JOURNAL OF POLITICS & CULTURE

VOL. XXIV, No. 1 \$5.00

## Falling Apart/ Coming Together

Can we overcome our  
differences?

**Also**  
**Virginia for Sale**

**Politics and  
gay sex**

Cedric Maurice vents frustration at  
"Son of White Man"



**L**et me give you a word on the philosophy of reform. The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all absorbing, and for the time being putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what people will submit to, and you have found the exact amount of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them; and these will continue until they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.

Frederick Douglass

Letter to an abolitionist associate, 1849

## SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

**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 as one of the leading journals in the region. In just the past five years, the magazine has received a Project Censored Award, the Sidney Hillman Award for courageous reporting on racial injustice, two Alternative Press Awards for best regional publication, and a National Magazine Award.

**THE INSTITUTE FOR SOUTHERN STUDIES** is a non-profit 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.

**THE INSTITUTE** is supported by foundations and individual members. Annual membership is \$24 and includes a full year of *Southern Exposure* (four issues), periodic action alerts, and discounts on Institute resources and publications. Address all membership correspondence to the Institute, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702, (919) 419-8311 or fax (919) 419-8315 to place credit card orders (MasterCard or Visa).

---

**COVER DESIGN** by Mia Kirsh

---

# Contents

Southern Exposure  
Vol. XXIV, No. 1  
Spring 1996



## FALLING APART/ COMING TOGETHER

- 20** **Falling Apart/Coming Together**  
There are ways of making us talk.  
*By Dottye Burt-Markowitz, Stan Markowitz, and the staff of the Piedmont Peace Project*
- 21** **Crossing the Line**  
Staff of the Piedmont Peace Project tell how they build bridges to different groups.  
*By Laurie Schecter*
- 25** **A Bridge Not Yet Built**  
Low-income white men are not a lost cause.  
*By Jesse Wimberley*
- 28** **From Little Black Sambo to Son of White Man**  
Southern theaters struggle to work and play together.  
*By Pat Arnou*
- 34** **All God's Children?**  
The Christian right is trying to appeal to African Americans.  
*By Ron Nixon*
- 36** **The Lion and the Lamb**  
Some Southern churches embrace diversity.  
*By Mary Lee Kerr*
- 39** **Profiles in Cooperation**  
Grassroots groups are mixing their cultivars to build a stronger turf.  
*By Jan Hearne*
- 44** **The Business of Anti-Racism**  
Diversity training is a new and growing industry.  
*By Gary Delgado*
- 48** **Resources**  
Books and videos tell how we can work together.

### FEATURES

- 10** **Virginia for Sale**  
Business interests and campaign contributors decide what's best for the state.  
*By Mike Hudson and Cathryn McCue*
- 15** **Voices: God Don't Make Mistakes**  
Notes of a "professional queer."  
*By Stan Holt*

### DEPARTMENTS

- 2** **From the Editor**
- 3** **Roundup**
- 9** **Followup: Poverty, Inc.**  
*By Mike Hudson*
- 49** **Fiction: Awake, Awake and Fly Away**  
*By Jennifer Moses*
- 55** **Junebug: Ms. Antoinette's Version of the Rabbit and the Turtle**  
*By Junebug Jabbo Jones*
- 59** **Blueprint: Moonlighting for Justice**  
*By Lynda McDaniel and Betsy Barton*
- 62** **Review: The Myth of Aunt Jemima** by Diane Roberts  
*By Kevin O'Kelly*
- 64** **Still the South: Fire Ants**  
*By Mary Lee Kerr*

# SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

SPRING 1996

## EDITOR

Pat Arnow

## ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Ron Nixon

## SECTION EDITORS

### FALLING APART/COMING TOGETHER

Piedmont Peace Project

### INVESTIGATIVE

Eric Bates

### VOICES

Nayo Watkins

### BLUEPRINT

Ron Nixon

### STILL THE SOUTH

Mary Lee Kerr

### FICTION

Jo Carson

### JUNEBUG

John O'Neal

### BOOK REVIEW

Janet Irons

### ROUNDUP

Wendy Grossman

### DESIGN

Mia Kirsh

### CIRCULATION

Sharon Ugochukwu

### INTERNS

Dana Clark Felty, Priya Giri, Wendy Grossman

### SPECIAL THANKS TO

Center for Democratic Renewal, Terri Boykin, Jane Fish, Sally Gregory, Betty Meeler, Jennie Miller, People for the American Way, Public Eye, Haila Rusch, Laurene Scalf, Mab Segrest, Deb Sunick, Jackie William's class at Hillside High School, Michelle Ugochukwu

### INSTITUTE FOR SOUTHERN STUDIES BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cindy Arnold, Marty Belin, Laura Benedict, Cynthia Brown, Julian Bond, Pat Bryant, Pat Callair, Bill Chafe, Christina Davis-McCoy, James Green, Christina Greene, Jim Lee, Leslie McLemore, Ted Outwater, Ted Rosengarten, Len Stanley, Dimi Stephen, Sue Thrasher.

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Tema Okun

### INVESTIGATIVE ACTION FUND DIRECTOR

Ron Nixon

### FINANCE

Sharon Ugochukwu

### SENIOR RESEARCH CONSULTANT

Bob Hall

Copyright 1996 by the Institute for Southern Studies  
**SOUTHERN EXPOSURE** is published quarterly by the Institute for Southern Studies, and is available with a membership in the Institute for \$24 per year. Manuscripts and photos may be submitted if accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Address correspondence to P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702. Telephone 919-419-8311 or FAX 919-419-8315, e-mail SEExpos@aol.com.  
**SOUTHERN EXPOSURE** is indexed in *Alternative Press Index*, *The American Humanities Index*, and *Access: The Supplementary Index to Periodicals*, and is available on microfilm from University Microfilm, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Second-class postage is paid at Durham, NC 27702 and additional offices.  
ISSN: 0146-809X. Post Office No. 053470.  
**POSTMASTER:** Send form 3579 with address changes to *Southern Exposure*, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.

**Corrections:** In "Working in Harm's Way" in the Fall/Winter 1995 issue, Rep. Tom DeLay was identified as being from Illinois. He is from Texas. (We knew that). The Consumer Products Safety Commission employee identified as Art Donovan is actually Art McDonald.

From the Editor

In the "Voices" section of this issue, Stan Holt describes a remarkable personal journey. He tells how he has worked to integrate his spirituality, sexuality, and place in the community. As a gay man from a conservative religious background, there were no models. His journey has taken courage and heart, and has made him a dedicated social activist.

Stan is a friend. When he was a staff member of the Institute for Southern Studies (which publishes *Southern Exposure*), we often discussed his quest to merge the seemingly irreconcilable facets of his character. I urged him to write about it, for he seemed to be creating new paths. I'm grateful that he did.

It is a happy coincidence that Stan's piece is in this issue. He works now for the Piedmont Peace Project, the organization that edited our special section, "Falling Apart/Coming Together." The section explores how individuals from diverse life experiences can work together. I believe Stan's story makes an excellent companion piece. He explores on a personal level what people in the groups profiled are attempting on an organizational level.

It's been rewarding working with a group as conscientious as Piedmont Peace Project. Jane Wholey proved an able, sensible coordinator for the project. Jesse Wimberley, in his first piece for publication, wrote an insightful meditation on the low-income white men who have been all but forsaken by progressive groups. Dotty and Stan Markowitz pondered the misunderstandings in social change movements. In a roundtable, staff members talked about their work. In the other stories, including work from the *Southern Exposure* staff, they provided painstaking editorial advice, always grounded in their political and social beliefs.

We discussed large concepts and agonized over implications of a single phrase or a photo. And we did find many people courageously fighting racism, sexism, and homophobia in their communities and in their own organizations.

Some extraordinary individuals doing extraordinary work have left the Institute for Southern Studies' staff in recent months: executive director Isaiah Madison, research director Mary Lee Kerr, and Investigative Action Fund director (and former *Southern Exposure* editor) Eric Bates. We made them promise to continue working with us in various capacities before we'd let them out the door. Still, it's hard not having their energy and creativity around here on a daily basis.

Tema Okun, a long-time staffer for Grassroots Leadership who cut her activist teeth at the Institute more than 20 years ago, has taken a break from school to become our interim director. She is conducting an assessment to figure out what we need to be doing in coming years. She is querying former staff, board members, and other supporters. See the inside back cover for more information, and let us know your thoughts.

— Pat Arnow

The section explores how individuals from diverse life experiences can work together.

**IN THE NAME OF THE RACIST**

SAVANNAH, GA. — The state of Georgia named one of Savannah's newest landmarks, the bridge connecting Georgia to South Carolina, after a devoted racist and segregationist, former governor Eugene Talmadge.

The four-term governor, who served in the 1930s and '40s, was one of the worst symbols of racism in his time. He fervently fought integration, used race-baiting to win elections, and because of his views on segregation, was responsible for the state's university system losing its accreditation. He once praised Adolph Hitler as "a mighty fine man."

Built in 1991, the bridge replaces the 40-year-old structure named after Talmadge. Some are opposing the bridge retaining the name connected to such a racist, anti-Semitic man.

"It has always been the Talmadge Bridge and always should remain the Talmadge Bridge," said House Speaker Tom Murphy. "He is the one that got the money to build it. As far as I am concerned, if it wasn't for him, we wouldn't have the bridge."

Murphy says that he's not promoting Talmadge's values and actions in retaining the bridge's name. "I am not racist or anti-Semitic. Some of my best friends are in those segments," he said.

Chatham County Chairman Joe Mahany instigated a debate over the bridge's name when he proposed that the structure be named for former Georgia governor and U.S. president, Jimmy Carter. A few days after the proposition, the Department of Transportation board

passed a resolution declaring that all bridges built to replace older bridges in the state must retain their prior names. Getting Talmadge's name off the bridge would take a vote by the entire General Assembly — and with Murphy as House Speaker, it isn't likely to happen, observers say.

The motion to retain the bridge's name came a few weeks before Savannah elected its first black mayor, Floyd Adams, Jr. Curtis V. Cooper, president of the local chapter of the NAACP, remembers Talmadge's hateful speeches. Cooper says that the NAACP will be exploring ways of getting the name changed. "I really am not happy even discussing this. I remember Mr. Talmadge (when I was) a little boy, hearing him use the 'n' word and other things. He would just get on a stump somewhere and just tear us apart. I can hear him now. And everyone knows it. That is what makes it so appalling," Cooper said. "We have many outstanding Georgians who, in our opinion, are far more deserving of this great honor, and it would not be so embarrassing to us."

Members of the DOT board, however, defend their action. "I cast my vote because I felt it was the right thing to do. There is a lot of history behind that bridge. . . . We believe in tradition here in Georgia. If it was good enough in the past, it is good enough in the present," said DOT Vice-Chairman James Lester.

—Lynda Natali

**NO PLACE LIKE HOMELESS**

THE SOUTH — Cities across the country are providing new beds for homeless people — in jails. "It seems to be a trend that cities that don't have enough services for homeless people are choosing to criminalize behavior that is not voluntary, such as sleeping outside when there isn't enough shelter space," says Rick Herz of The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. The center has released a report, "No Homeless People Allowed: A Report on Anti-Homeless Laws, Litigation and Alternatives in 49 United States Cities." Using information gathered from city documents and service providers, the report estimates the number of homeless in urban areas and tells about recent laws that affect the homeless, as well as the enforcement of these laws.

Cities across the nation, many in the South, have aggressively tried to get rid of the homeless by passing and enforcing strict ordi-

*continued on next page*

**LITTLE WOMAN CRASHES STAG PARTY — OR — BOONE KILLS HER A BUCK**

FLOYD, VA. — One dawn last October, Melissa Boone drew back her bow and shot an arrow into a 250-pound buck.

After she reported the kill, three game wardens came to her house asking her to take a polygraph test. They said they didn't think Boone, a slender woman who is five feet tall, could carry a bow and arrow, much less shoot it.

"It really hurt my feelings," Boone said. A resident of Floyd, just south of Roanoke, Boone, 27, was raised in hunting country

and has been going into the woods since she was a teenager. "I got harassed 'cause I'm a little woman."

The rumor was spread that Boone didn't kill the 16-point buck herself, but that her husband had killed it without a license and had her report it because she did have one, *The Washington Post* reported. The paper listed other allegations against Boone: some said that she illegally "spotlighted" the deer (shining a light in the animal's eyes to freeze it before shooting). Some said she ran it down with a car, while others claim that a bullet fell out of the deer's ear while he was at the taxidermist — which

would be illegal, since it was not firearms season.

"An illegal kill is a very serious matter, and the wardens had to investigate," said Rich Jefferson, coordinator of external affairs of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Asking Boone to take a polygraph test was not unusual, he claimed. Neither was the fact that game wardens made her fire her bow and arrow to demonstrate her skill. She hit the bull's-eye.



The following month, she picked up first place in the Virginia State Big Game Trophy show.

—Wendy Grossman

nances against such activities as panhandling, sleeping on park benches, camping, or even reclining in public places. A few Southern cities try to provide adequate shelter space and services, but those towns are in the minority.

Some of the worst anti-homeless laws and cases have come out of the South, Herz says. The center recently ranked Atlanta in the top five cities with the most hostile anti-homeless laws. The other four were all on the West Coast. Here's what "No Homeless People Allowed" reports for some Southern areas in the last few years.

#### ALABAMA

##### HUNTSVILLE

Estimates are that there are between 560 and 870 homeless in this city of 308,000 residents. With 577 shelter beds available, up to 300 homeless have nowhere to go.

In 1993 the city tried to remove homeless people by conducting sweeps, seizing property, closing temporary shelters, enforcing sleeping and urination laws, and rezoning shelters out of existence.

#### FLORIDA

##### COLLIER COUNTY

There are between 500 and 1,500 homeless people in this beachfront area but shelter space for only 100. Camping within a mile of the beach is outlawed, which prevents encampments by the homeless.

##### FT. LAUDERDALE

There are an estimated 5,600 homeless people in this city of 1.3 million people, but there are only 539 shelter beds in the entire county.

The city declared a downtown parking lot known as "tent city" a safe zone for homeless people. The residents of tent city

filed suit to get the city to improve unsanitary, dangerous conditions.

Homeless plaintiffs also brought suit against city park and beach rules that restricted social services from operating in parks, that prevented sleeping, reclining or storing personal property in designated areas of city parks, and from soliciting on the beach and sidewalk.

##### JUPITER/PALM BEACH COUNTY

Police arrested homeless people who were sleeping in the woods in 1994. The homeless had no place else to go since there were some 4,000 homeless people in the area and only 84 emergency beds. A local resident, Sandy Hamilton, opened a homeless shelter, but has almost been made homeless herself because she's invested so much of her personal funds into helping fight anti-homeless laws.

##### MIAMI

Florida's largest city (2.8 million residents) has as many as 6,500 homeless people, but has beds for only about one-third of them.

In 1993 the county adopted a 1 percent tax on restaurant meals, grossing \$400,000 per year. The proceeds go to funding facilities and services for homeless people.

In 1994 the city bulldozed a shantytown of 25 shacks in Bicentennial Park. City leaders called it a "humane way to get the homeless off the streets and into treatment." A group of homeless people who were arrested several times under the city's begging law brought suit, saying the law was used solely for the purpose of getting them off the street and locked away out of sight in jail.

##### TALLAHASSEE

A local McDonald's

served people who "looked homeless" with trespass warnings, even though the apparent vagrants had paid for food.

#### GEORGIA

##### ATLANTA

In this city of more than 3 million residents, 15,000 to



22,000 are homeless. There are only 2,700 beds for them.

In 1994 the city closed Woodruff Park, the main area where homeless people lived. Many believe that the city is throwing homeless people into jail in an effort to prettify the city before the Olympics. However, the city has repealed an ordinance preventing sleeping on park benches. The American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia filed suit against the constitutionality of Atlanta's "Parking Lot Ordinance," which says that a person cannot be in a parking lot if that person does not have a vehicle parked there.

#### NORTH CAROLINA

##### DURHAM

There are 275 homeless around Durham, and most of them have a place to sleep at night, since there are 270 beds for individuals and up to nine families.

Last year the city council adopted an anti-panhand-

ling ordinance, but this law hasn't been vigorously enforced.

##### RALEIGH

There are 800 homeless people in the state capitol, but only 310 to 350 emergency beds. In 1994 the city council passed an

ordinance prohibiting loitering with intent to solicit a person in a motor vehicle. However, there has been little enforcement.

#### TEXAS

##### DALLAS

There are 3,500-5,000 homeless in Dallas, 1,729 emergency shelter beds, and transitional housing for 69 families.

In 1994 the city council voted to use a trespass law to evict a shantytown of about 200. They also banned people from City Hall Plaza and other downtown areas between midnight and 5 a.m.

Homeless people filed suit to prevent enforcement of laws prohibiting people being around the convention center, library, and plaza at night.

Texas courts ruled that Dallas' law against sleeping in public was unconstitutional but that laws prohibiting coercive solicitation, removal of trash from recep-

tacles, and trespassing were acceptable.

**HOUSTON**

This city of 3.5 million people has 10,000 homeless people. Each night 20 percent stay in shelters, 20 percent in public places, and 60 percent in abandoned buildings.

Encampments are growing under U.S. Highway 59, but the city is ignoring them so far.

**VIRGINIA**

**ALEXANDRIA**

There are 230 shelter beds in this suburb of Washington, D.C. The beds are almost always full, but there's no estimate of those who don't seek shelter.

In 1994 the city passed an ordinance prohibiting panhandling within 15 feet of an ATM machine, panhandling of people driving their cars, or panhandling in an "aggressive manner."

**TENNESSEE**

**MEMPHIS**

The city has 1 million residents, 3,000 of whom are homeless each night. There are 939 shelter beds.

The city placed red parking-type meters in tourist and busy downtown areas with signs that read, "Please do not give cash to homeless people — a donation here will provide for the homeless."

The city requires homeless people to get a permit to panhandle.

**NASHVILLE**

The home of country music has 1 million residents, and 1,200 to 1,500 of them live on the street. There are approximately 1,100 shelter beds.

The city has set up parking-type meters like those in Memphis. The meters are intended to fund service providers and are popular among merchants and tourists.

— Wendy Grossman

**A SWEEP FOR THE GOLD**

**ATLANTA** — If visitors to the Olympic Games want to see the city the way thousands of homeless people do, they can pick up "SpoilSport's Guidebook to Atlanta," a pamphlet that "doesn't cover up our city's problems." Supposedly written by someone who became homeless when her landlord refused to renew her lease because he could make more money renting to tourists during the Olympics, SpoilSport shows what's happened to Atlanta because of the games.

SpoilSport claims to be the half-sister of Izzy, "the bright blue, buck-toothed mascot of the Centennial Olympic Games." Like Candace Gingrich, SpoilSport finds her half-brother's actions misguided. "Unfortunately, he got the short end of the stick when it came to brains. When the Olympic boys asked him to be the mascot, he agreed without thinking much about what the Olympics mean to the people who actually live in the city of Atlanta."

"Promoted as an economic booster for the city, the Centennial Olympic Games have yet to show their benefits to the majority of Atlanta's citizens," says Adam Horowitz of Empty the Shelters. The organization, devoted to securing the rights of the homeless, published the satirical guidebook.

SpoilSport's guide features all the information in a traditional guidebook including transportation, nightlife, places to stay, and places to eat. "For the early birds with a taste tending towards good ol' down home fare at prices our mama can't top, the Butler St. A.M.E. Church Grit Line is a must," writes SpoilSport.

She also recommends "a hearty bowl of soup at St. Lukes Episcopal Church lunch line," and "the most adventurous route of them all: dumpster diving." She adds, "For thousands of Atlanta

*Photo by David Tulis*



**A PROTESTER DISRUPTS AN OLYMPIC T-SHIRT AUCTION.**

citizens, this form of gastronomic creativity is an every night affair."

This isn't the first time a city has swept its streets for the Olympic games. In 1988, Seoul, South Korea, officials arrested 15,000 people and removed 4,000 homeless people from their city. At least 700,000 poor city dwellers were evicted.

As public housing has been razed to put up Olympic venues and the homeless are pushed out to make way for a sleek new look for the city, "SpoilSport considers whether the 'city too busy to hate' might more aptly be called the 'city too busy to care.'"

One police officer told CopWatch, a branch of Empty The Shelters that monitors police abuse, that "the city's goal is to run [the homeless] out of town. The city is not going to do anything to help them."

— Priya Giri

**ABORTION - A - THON**

**GAINESVILLE, Fla.** — Anti-abortion picketers are working hard these days for abortion rights.

The Gainesville Reproductive Health Network, a union of three local clinics and Gainesville's Planned Parenthood, has organized a program that raises money for women in need of abortions. "Pledge-a-Picketer" is turning anti-abortion protest and ha-

arrassment into pro-choice financial aid and moral support for low-income women.

Pro-choice supporters pledge a tax-deductible dollar amount — five cents to five dollars — for every person who protests at any abortion clinic in Gainesville. The money raised from "Pledge-a-Picketer" goes to Planned Parenthood's Women in Need Fund, designed to provide abortion services for Medicaid-eligible women. Pierce

Butler, assistant public affairs director at Planned Parenthood, says that enough money has been raised from "Pledge-a-Picketer" to fund abortions for 10 women since July.

"We're not doing this to annoy protesters; we're doing this to help the women," says Virginia Williams, former counselor at the Gainesville Women's Health Center.

However, anti-abortion picketers all receive hand-

delivered "thank-you" cards, acknowledging their contribution to getting women the abortions they want.

— Dana Clark Felty

## ELVISIAN STUDIES

**OXFORD, Miss.**— Hold onto your blue suede shoes: Elvis Presley has catapulted from the tabloids into the literary canon. He is becoming a Southern personage studied alongside the likes of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor.

"In Search of Elvis: The First Annual International Conference on Elvis Presley" at the University of Mississippi in Oxford last summer, attracted more than 100 teachers, folklorists, artists, and rock fans (termed "Elvisians" by English professor Vernon Chadwick, the founder of the conference) for a six-day study of the King's life and work.

In lectures, panel discussions, storytelling, readings, presentations, field trips to important places in the King's life, as well as musical performances, Elvisian scholars and lay people defined, debated, decoded, and deconstructed the career of the king of rock 'n' roll.

An artistic prodigy emerged, a man who fused the American South's musical genres, managing to leap boundaries of class, race, religion, and morality while captivating millions of fans around the world.

Sociologist John Shelton Reed placed Presley in a long line of white Southern "meritocrats" who make it big in entertainment, sports, or the military by exploiting America's "readiness to reward genius." Yet, Presley "never got above his raisin' [amidst] poverty compa-

## CANARIES SING THE BLUES

**HOUSTON**—"Just as canaries warned miners of dangerous gases in the shafts, women today may be warning of dangers in our environment through their increased rates of cancer," says Joy Mullet, President of the Houston Women's Caucus for Art. This Spring the caucus is agitating for more breast cancer research through their "Canary Projects," a series of art events that spotlights suspected causes of breast cancer.

Mullet envisioned the "Canary Projects" after watching two of her friends die from breast cancer in their 40s. They went through what Mullet calls "slash-poison-burn" treatments, the surgeries and chemotherapies that cause great pain and are not always effective. "It made me so angry," she says.

Asking for more research on causes of breast cancer in Houston, a city strongly tied to chemical manufacturing, is controversial. But Houston breast cancer rates exceed state norms.

There are three main projects this year:

### MOTHER EARTH SCULPTURE

Formed from earth and plants, an 80-foot matriarch will recline on the bank of Buffalo Bayou. Mother Earth is pregnant, symbolizing her ability to nurture and renew life. She is also missing one breast, the cost of pollution.

### MATUSCHKA AT FOTOFEST

Houston will hold its biennial FotoFest this March, an international Month of Photography. The event showcases work from North and South America, Europe, and Asia. To insure representation of their cause, the Cau-

erable to that of today's Third World," Reed said.

The "redneck" in Presley is what makes him a target of ridicule and disdain even today, said author Will Campbell. This attitude prevents many from acknowledging that "his very being started a revolution throughout the world. Elvis serves as a convenient symbol and metaphor for the elitist portion of society that despises working class people," Campbell said.



**ARTISTS AND EXCAVATORS HOPE TO ZIPPER "MOTHER EARTH ECO-SCULPTURE" INTO THE PUBLIC ART LANDSCAPE IN HOUSTON AS PART OF THE CANARY PROJECTS.**

cus invited photographer Matuschka. Her photographs have appeared in magazines around the world. But her work drastically changed with her mastectomy in 1991. "I lost a breast, but the world gained an activist," Matuschka says.

*The New York Times Magazine* printed on its cover Matuschka's "Beauty out of Damage," a self-portrait of her baring her mastectomy scar. Matuschka was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for this confrontational photo.

### CHAPEL OF PIONEERS

Those who have lost loved ones to breast cancer are constructing a place of honor to show the human toll of the disease. Medical teams, families, and friends are gathering photos and personal objects from those who died from breast cancer. Images of these items will be projected on a glowing ceiling in Houston's Firehouse Gallery.

— Lynda Harrell



embodying a new "teen-oriented consumer subculture and unprecedented freedom," said music critic Stephen Tucker.

Presley was the first who brought together two genres that had borrowed from the same traditions but had remained separated by race. "On his very first single, he fused by fire country music and rhythm and blues from 'colored' radio — and it was revolutionary," said producer Dick Waterman.

"Riding the back of black rhythms, [Elvis] aroused white bodies," said music professor Jon Michael Spender. His gyrations, borrowed from all-night gospel sings and Delta juke joints, "seduced whites into blackness," Spender said. "The insinuation, the intrusion of black rhythms into Elvis' music canceled and reunited oppositions of body and spirit. Elvis made sex seem God-given, not God-forsaken."

At least one conferee, English professor Peter Nazareth, even credited Presley with being a purposeful social critic. By cleverly "sanitizing" the lyrics to songs he covered, and through the manipulation of carefully planted signs and symbols in his performances, Presley smuggled political statements — anti-racist, anti-corporate, anti-colonialist, anti-war — past the "propaganda barrier" upheld by Hollywood and the recording industry, posited Nazareth. "You Ain't Nothin' but a Hound Dog," signaled to white supremacists that Presley thought they were nothing but "a pack of dogs let loose by the master to track down his runaway slaves."

This wasn't the only extravagant claim for Presley's importance at the conference. Presley archivist Ernst Jorgensen called the singer a direct descendant of such ro-



**SCHOLARS PETER NAZARETH AND BILL FERRIS DISCUSS ELVIS AT A UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI CONFERENCE.**

mantic American heroes as Natty Bumpo and Huck Finn.

Folk artist and preacher Howard Finster proclaimed that Presley was "a gift from God" sent to help repopulate the world after two decimating world wars.

Folklorist Roger Manley presented evidence suggesting Elvis was an "outsider artist," bent on communicating a message of spiritual rebirth.

Commenting on the burgeoning Elvis impersonation industry, sociologist Mark Gottdiener called the Dead Elvis "a certain solution to a crisis in American Christianity and culture." The Dead Elvis is "a sanctified icon" to which impersonators attach in order to express themselves freely. "The Dead Elvis lets you liberate yourself from the constraints of organized religions," Gottdiener said.

Anthropology professor William Ferris saw Presley as a new gun in the literary canon. "Like Walt Whitman and James Joyce, Elvis compares with every artist that communicates directly to young people in confrontation with an establishment. He is our most powerful weapon to excite students today."

— Robert F. James

## BRINGING BEIJING BACK SOUTH

Walking through a crowd of 40,000 women all speaking different languages, playing ethnic music, and in native dress of countries across the globe, Carol Judy of the Woodland Community Land Trust in Tennessee was overwhelmed at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. The "telephone directory-sized" booklet of workshops was enough to make any activist feel like she was in a candy store, she said.

"It was like a college campus," Judy said. "You're so busy participating and learning that you don't have time to stop and see where you are."

Many Southern grassroots

women spent most of their time at the Non-Governmental Organization Forum in Hairou. Issues raised at this forum resonated for many of the women who came back home to the South and back to local examples of what they spoke of on a global scale.

"Many people fail to understand how global these problems are," said Cynthia Brown, director for Southerners for Economic Justice and City Councilwoman for Durham, North Carolina. "People connecting their stories is very empowering."

Monica Jones, a staff writer for the Southern Organizing Committee in Atlanta and an official observer of the U.N. proceedings, echoed a similar sense. "My overall concern is the arrogance of

*continued next page*

## FREETHINKER BUSTED FOR BIG MOUTH

CLAYTON COUNTY, Ga. — At a meeting of the Clayton County Board of Commissioners, Bonnie McGuire, a member of the Atlanta Freethought Society, spoke out against a resolution supporting forced prayers in the county public schools. Commissioner Terry Star responded: "Little girl, Jesus Christ is everywhere in the world. You need to take Jesus into your heart and get right with the Lord!"

McGuire retorted with a crude remark that she now says she can't repeat over the phone.

Infuriated, Star demanded that she be removed from the meeting. A bystander, who happened to be a plainclothes policeman, started dragging her away.

"Don't you touch me. I'll kick you. I'll fight back!" she screamed. He showed her his badge, but she'd already started fighting with him. She was taken downtown, and charged with assault and battery on a policeman, profanity, and trespassing (because she didn't leave when they asked her to go).

Released on a \$2,900 bond and left with a bruise on her arm the size of a grapefruit, McGuire plans to fight the charges. Michael Hauptmann, a First Amendment attorney, has offered to defend her on a *pro bono* basis.



the U.S.," she said. "We tend to carry the air of 'it doesn't apply to me.'"

Members of the "real third world" and delegates representing America's unrecognized third world — including economically underdeveloped areas of the South — discussed issues from cultural diversity and how it affects development to environmental concerns and land ownership. Judy, one of the presenters at the forum and an official delegate to the conference as a whole, realized that the United States could adopt some of the practices of other countries. Instead of directly involving members of a community in a problem, as she said other countries do, for example, "the first thing they do [here] is gather statistics."

Jones came back from Beijing worried about the stance of the U.S. on the issue of human rights for women. The "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" is U.N.-backed but still not signed by the United States. The U.S. must be held accountable for not signing, Jones said.

Local women left the conference energized that the work they have been doing is helping to make global change on local levels.

"Attending the Beijing conference affirmed the work that Southerners for Economic Justice already does," Brown said.

Just now, they know that there are millions of women all over the world working with them, helping to make a change.

—Priya Giri

## MARCHING TO HER OWN BEAT

**ATLANTA**—Called a "drum major for justice in the rural South," 30-year-old Angela Brown is one of four recipients

of the 1995 Reebok Human Rights Award.

At 14, Brown began raising consciousness about education, voter registration, and women's issues. She organized the 1990 National

Photo by Randall Richards



ANGELA BROWN

March for Justice in Education in Selma, Alabama, and the creation of the Leadership Initiative Project to promote youth leadership and fight academic tracking in North Carolina.

Brown now fights environmental injustices done to minorities and low-income people. As founder of the Youth Task Force of the Southern Organizing Committee, she demanded attention on a national level to end environmental injustice. A 1995 United States General Accounting Office report claims that environmental justice has now become a top priority of the Environmental Protection Agency. Brown successfully organized a joining of Greenpeace with the Youth Task Force and prevented the installation of a PVC plant in Wallace, Louisiana, and stopped the construction of a hazardous waste incinerator in Noxubee, Mississippi.

—Priya Giri

## ANNE ROMAINE

**GASTONIA, NC**—For 30 years she sang at rallies, picket lines, union and civil rights meetings in support of struggles for justice. Anne Romaine, a 52-year-old musician, activist, and organizer died last fall in Gastonia. Romaine, co-founder of the Southern Folk Cultural Revival Project, died of a ruptured appendix. She had delayed entering the hospital for over 24 hours because she feared huge medical bills. She was one of 40 million people in the United States without health insurance. The Southern Organizing Committee urges activists to intensify work for universal health care and health care justice in memorial to her untimely death. (See inside back cover.)

## IN GOD THEY MISTRUST

**TALLADEGA, Ala.**—The fireworks set off last July weren't to celebrate the nation's freedom from England, but from God. One hundred and sixty-three agnostics and atheists from 15 states, mainly Southerners,



attended the '95 Lollapalooza of free thought.

"We were celebrating our freedom from religion," says Roger Cleveland, former director of the Alabama Freethought Association. He hosted the gathering on his 69 acres next to his 12-acre lake. People in RVs and tents

camped out through light rain to celebrate the Fourth their way.

People of all ages, from Cleveland's baby granddaughter to 93-year-old Walter Hoops, gathered to hear speakers, hand out warning stickers to put in hotel Bibles, and vote to have the U.N. declare the '90s "the decade of secular alternatives." The group also decided to continue their campaign to have "In God We Trust" removed from U.S. currency. (They recently lost a case when the Denver Circuit Court ruled that the motto is not religious, saying that the Freedom From Religion Foundation failed to prove that the phrase hurt anyone.) They're also working on breaking the slabs of 10 commandments scattered in court houses throughout the South. The slabs were originally given to towns in 1956 as promotional items for the movie *The Ten Commandments* starring Charlton Heston.

The Lake Hypatia Freethought Hall, built on an acre of property Cleveland donated, is the only

freethought hall in the South, he says.

"The way it is in the Bible Belt, you've got a church on every corner," Cleveland says. "It's a rarity that there's a place for free thinkers to meet and get together and socialize."

—Wendy Grossman

Wall Street wants more poor people to carry on a great American tradition — going into debt.

# Up the Downscale Market

By Mike Hudson

The last time *Southern Exposure* updated readers on the poverty industry (fall 1994 as a followup to "Poverty, Inc.," issue in 1993) some companies had been hit with record fines for their price gouging and fraud. But the penalties didn't slow down the burgeoning market for lenders and other businesses that target low-income and credit-impaired consumers.

In fact, the "downscale" market has continued to attract big investors. High-rate loans on cars and houses make up the biggest parts of this \$200 billion to \$300 billion a year "poverty industry."

Local mortgage lenders targeting the disadvantaged have given way to regional companies, which in turn have given way to nationwide high-interest lenders. "A tragic thing is occurring — Wall Street and these giant corporations have realized that poor people don't have much, but the little that they have is accessible to them," says Bill Brennan, a Legal Aid attorney in Atlanta. He has a firsthand view of the effects of loans with exorbitant rates. With so many poor people in America — especially in the South — "it adds up and becomes big numbers."

One thing that's fueling the growth in the downscale home-loan market is the proliferation of "mortgage-backed" securities on Wall Street. These investment products, which are backed by the income streams from "bundles" of home loans, have become increasingly popular among high-rate mortgage companies.

"It's resulted in a boom of cash being thrown at these lenders," says Jonathan S. Hornblass, publisher of *Home Equity News*, an independent newsletter. "Finding the money to make the loans used to be the hardest thing about this business. Now they just have too much money."



## GREED INDEX

Some big companies have been accused of fleecing low-income and minority consumers

**\$\$ MERCURY FINANCE CO.**, the nation's leading financier of car loans for people with bad credit, was hit with a \$50 million jury verdict in Alabama. A customer accused it of padding a \$3,000 car loan with a hidden charge of \$1,000. The trial judge later reduced the verdict to \$2 million.

**\$\$ PAYCO AMERICAN**, one of the nation's largest debt collectors, agreed to pay \$500,000 to settle charges it harassed consumers, The Federal Trade Commission said. Payco heaped debtors with obscenities and falsely threatened them with arrest. It was the largest fine ever under the U.S. Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.

**\$\$ FORD MOTOR CREDIT CO.** has agreed to pay more than \$120 million to settle allegations that it illegally inflated car buyers' loans by adding in overpriced accident insurance. The charges involved at least 650,000 borrowers nationwide.

**\$\$ BARNETT BANKS** of Florida paid \$19 million to settle similar "force-placed" car insurance allegations. One Barnett borrower, for example, ended up with a \$1,500 insurance bill after paying off a \$4,000 loan.

Hornblass concedes "there are some nightmare stories" about people being ripped off in the burgeoning home equity market. But he says mortgage securities have helped nudge down rates for disadvantaged borrowers and helped provide loans for people who have nowhere else to go. "It's a tough call. I think it basically boils down to whether you're in favor of debt or against it. This country has really been built on debt."

But Brennan and other critics say mortgage securities have opened up a huge pool of cash for predatory lenders. This has allowed them to expand their reach in low-income and minority communities. Lawsuits and government investigations across the South indicate that fraud and price gouging are still common in the high-rate mortgage industry — and in other businesses that target vulnerable consumers.

A growing number of Southerners are trying to change this. To fight for better protections for low-income and blue-

collar consumers, a group of attorneys and community activists have joined the American Association of Retired Persons to create the Consumer Law Center of the South. Based in Atlanta, the center will fight for reform via legislation, litigation, and regulation.

Meanwhile, fair-lending activists continue to win concessions from banks. In December, Charlotte-based NationsBank Corporation agreed to offer \$500 million in flexible and inexpensive mortgages in low-income neighborhoods in Charlotte, Atlanta, and other cities. The loans will be funneled through a union-affiliated group, National Assistance Corporation of America, which is already running a \$140 million loan program offered by Fleet Financial Group.

SE

*Mike Hudson, co-editor of the award-winning Southern Exposure special issue, "Poverty, Inc.," is editor of a new book, Merchants of Misery: How Corporate America Profits from Poverty, published this spring by Common Courage Press (Box 702, Monroe, ME 04951; 800-497-3207).*

WONDER WHAT REPUBLICANS HAVE IN STORE FOR THE STATES?  
 TAKE A LOOK AT VIRGINIA,  
 WHERE “REGULATORY REFORM” HAS A HEAD START.

AP/Wide World Photos



REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, SENATOR ROBERT DOLE OF KANSAS, HELPED REPUBLICAN GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATE GEORGE ALLEN BOOST CAMPAIGN IN RICHMOND IN 1993.

By Mike Hudson and Cathryn McCue

**W**HEN GEORGE ALLEN RAN FOR GOVERNOR OF VIRGINIA THREE YEARS AGO, HE EMERGED AS ONE OF THE EARLIEST REPUBLICAN CHAMPIONS OF “REGULATORY REFORM.” THE STATE, HE SAID, WAS SUFFERING “UNDER THE HEAVY, GRIMY BOOT OF EXCESSIVE TAXATION AND REGULATION.” BEFORE NEWT GINGRICH CONCEIVED THE CONTRACT WITH AMERICA, ALLEN PROMISED TO TRANSFORM STATE GOVERNMENT BY SLASHING BUREAUCRACY AND WEEDING OUT RULES NOT ESSENTIAL TO SAFEGUARD PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELFARE.

So when Allen created a new board last year to investigate complaints against car dealers, it looked like he was making good on his campaign promises. The state Motor Vehicle Dealers Board will operate on an annual budget of \$1 million — less than half what the state used to spend monitoring car dealers, and all of it covered by fees from the industry.

A closer look, however, reveals that the new board may be taking consumers for a ride. The state staff responsible for licensing 3,600 dealers and keeping an eye on nearly 700,000 car sales each year has been slashed from 40 to 25, including

six part-time employees. And the governor has handed over control of that staff to car dealers themselves — including many who were among the biggest contributors to his 1993 election campaign.

When the board meets in Richmond, 16 of the 19 members seated around the conference table represent the car industry. At least eight are car dealers who gave money to Allen through their companies or out of their own pockets.

Take one typical meeting last fall. At one bend of the table sat Arthur Casey, a Hampton Roads car dealer who gave Allen \$4,000. Next to him sat Frank Cowles, a Woodbridge car dealer and

long-time Allen supporter who gave the governor \$3,450. A few chairs over sat Tom Barton, a Virginia Beach Ford dealer and vice chair of the board. He gave \$2,550. Missing that day was board member Richard Sharp. He is chief executive of Circuit City Stores, which has begun a highly touted chain of CarMax used-car "superstores." Circuit City and its executives gave Allen \$57,500.

In all, the governor reaped \$71,800 through eight companies that now have a seat at the table when the Motor Vehicle Dealer Board meets.

Allen supporters say the creation of the car-dealer board shows the governor is taking power from bureaucrats and letting the private sector breathe business-like efficiency into the regulatory process. "I think he was looking for people who had the experience and had reputations they've built over the years," says board member Richard Kern, a Winchester car dealer who gave Allen \$2,300. "People that certainly weren't going to be 'yes men'— and who'd do what's best for the state."

But the car-dealer board is part of a broad effort underway in Virginia to let business interests and campaign contributors decide what's best for the state. In effect, Allen has moved to lock average citizens out of the governing process, stacking regulatory boards with representatives of the very industries they are supposed to regulate. His administration has weakened state agencies designed to protect consumers and the environment, making it easier for shady businesses and polluters to operate.

What is happening in Virginia offers a preview of what other states can expect if the GOP continues expanding its control of the Southern legislatures — and if Republicans in Congress succeed in giving more regulatory control to the states. "Virginia is being sold to the highest bidder," says Gary Kendall, a Charlottesville lawyer who works with labor, consumer, and environmental groups. "We're telling businesses, 'Come to Virginia; we'll let you have your way.' The theory is if we have cheap taxes, cheap labor, and no government interference, employers will come. We're becoming the Mexico of the U.S."

## ICING THE HOT LINE

When Allen ran for governor, he said Virginians were sick of bureaucrats telling them what to do. He promised to "put the people back in charge" and blasted his Democratic opponent, Mary Sue Terry, for "shaking down special interests who want to curry favor" with state government.

"Virginians won't be bought," he told a group of Ross Perot supporters in Roanoke. "And Virginia government is not for sale."

Now, Allen is running state agencies that oversee the same industries that gave generously to his campaign and inauguration. He received \$164,000 from coal companies and other mining firms, \$171,000 from oil companies and other energy interests, and \$311,000 from manufacturers.

In all, at least \$1.6 million of the \$3.9 million that Allen accepted in campaign contributions of \$500 or more came from business interests. What's more, 85 percent of the \$429,000 the governor collected for his inauguration came from businesses or corporate law firms.

From a business perspective, the money was well spent. As soon as Allen was sworn in, his first act as governor was to name a task force to develop ideas to "streamline" state agencies. The goal of his administration, he said, was to curb bureaucracy and create "a pro-business, pro-economic growth environment."

In practical terms, that has meant easing the enforcement of laws aimed at protecting people's pocketbooks. The administration has cut the staff of the state consumer affairs program by nearly half and shut down a toll-free hot line for consumer complaints. Consumer advocates say the cuts leave citizens more vulnerable to unscrupulous telemarketers, shady home contractors, and other scam artists.

Allen has also pushed for "self-regulatory" boards that put car dealers and other business people in charge of policing their own businesses. Car dealers insist that they will protect consumers. "The board wants to see that the customer is treated fairly," says Art Heberer, a board member who runs an auto-parts recycling business in Salem. "The incen-

tive to do this is to make sure that your customer is happy so they'll come back and buy another car from you later." But consumer advocates say the board will make it even harder to help individuals who have been wronged and to end patterns of misconduct. "The structure of this — turning it over to the industry — isn't adequate to protect the public," says Jean Ann Fox of the Virginia Citizens Consumer Council.

Fox points to a dispute over whether dealers should disclose their processing fees — which typically range from \$99 to \$200 — in a car's advertised price. The Consumer Council says yes. Dealers say no. An informal survey conducted by the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* showed that some members of the car-dealer board charge among the highest processing fees in the state.

Although there is one consumer on the board — added by the General Assembly after Governor Allen proposed membership for dealers only — consumer advocates predict the board will operate more as a trade group than as a watchdog agency. "Business people inherently have business as their first order of business," says Julie Lapham, director of Common Cause Virginia, a Richmond-based advocacy group. "The citizen gets relegated to the back burner."

## DIRTY MONEY

In addition to weakening protection for consumers, Allen has hobbled state agencies responsible for safeguarding air, soil, lakes and rivers, parks, and animals. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has lost 20 percent of its staff since the governor took office, and former and current staffers say the agency has become too cozy with the businesses it's supposed to watchdog. Peter Kostmayer, a former regional director of the federal Environmental Protection Agency, calls Allen "the best friend Virginia polluters ever had."

Virginia has never been known for being particularly tough on polluters. In 1988, for example, newspapers lambasted the administration of Democratic Governor Gerald Baliles for being too lax on the pesticide control industry. But environmentalists say Governor Allen is trying to gut even the modest protections

*A rural mountain county can't stop a corporation from burning them.*

## LOCAL CONTROL?

**Rocky Gap, Va.** — In between Hogback and Rich mountains, just a few miles from the West Virginia border, lies a quiet valley named after Wolf Creek. Not much happens here. Melinda Belcher's cows sometimes get loose. The creek floods now and then. Even the traffic on the interstate that runs the length of the valley becomes a gentle hum in the distance. Residents hardly hear it anymore.

Leverett and Peggy Trump retired here six years ago, Peggy being a native of Bland County. They picked a pretty spot, with a small field, some woods, and a stunning view of Hogback Mountain.

About the same time, a company called CaseLin Systems Inc. was choosing a site three miles up the valley for a medical waste incinerator that could net it millions of dollars. Since then, the Trumps have seen their peaceful retirement turned into a part-time fight against the garbage burner.

"It's the worst possible place for it," Leverett says. At 3,000 feet, and surrounded by ridges, the valley is prone to thermal inversions that trap fog and smoke from distant forest fires. The same thing would happen to air pollution from

the incinerator, says Trump. "It just gets in there and stays for days."

Melinda Belcher, who lives near the Trumps, would be the closest dairy farmer to the incinerator. She worries that chemicals would drift down on the 150 acres where her cows graze and contaminate their milk. "It scared me because this is my livelihood," she says.

Dairy farmers, who must test their milk every time it's picked up, are watched more closely than the incinerator would be. "That's what got me," Belcher says. "They're going to check these boys once a year. And this is really gross, but you think about what they're going to be burning. There is going to be a smell, and it is going to drive people away."

In December, the state Air Pollution

Photo by Stephanie Klein-Davis



**1994 FARMER OF THE YEAR MELINDA BELCHER WORRIES THAT CHEMICALS FROM A PROPOSED MEDICAL WASTE INCINERATOR WOULD DRIFT DOWN ONTO HER 150 ACRES AND CONTAMINATE THE MILK OF HER COWS GRAZING THERE.**

Control Board approved a permit for CaseLin to burn 40 tons of hospital gowns, syringes, body parts, bloodied sheets, and other infectious waste every

the state has provided to ensure clean air, land, and water. "Things have gone from bad to terrible," says Gary Kendall, the Charlottesville lawyer.

Environmentalists charge that campaign contributions the governor accepted from big polluters appear to influence his lax stance on protecting natural resources. During his 1993 campaign, Allen took \$10,000 from Smithfield Foods, a meat-packing company that has since run afoul of environmental laws. According to DEQ records, the Suffolk-based company violated state water pollution regulations at least 23 times between May 1994 and July 1995. In addition, federal officials are investigating the disappearance of thousands of company environmental records.

Smithfield Foods seems satisfied with the treatment it has received from the Allen administration. Last year the meat

packer contributed \$125,000 to the Campaign for Honest Change, a political action committee the governor set up to finance his bid for a Republican majority in the General Assembly.

The governor has also appointed big campaign contributors to top environmental positions. Peter Schmidt and his firm, Allied Concrete Company, contributed \$27,500 to Allen's campaign. In March 1994, an Allied subsidiary was involved in an environmental fiasco when it provided 200,000 tons of "fly ash," a byproduct of coal-fired power plants, to help transform an old city dump in Norfolk into a park. The ash was washed away by torrential rains, creating a gray sludge that oozed knee-deep into the surrounding neighborhood and clogged two acres of federally protected wetlands. Three months later, Schmidt was named director of the Department of En-

vironmental Quality. Since then, the agency has approved new regulations allowing even greater use of fly ash — a move that directly benefits his former company.

Allen paints critics of his "regulatory reform" efforts as opponents of economic growth. "I do think that regulations have to be reasonable and take into account the impact not only on woodpeckers, but also the impact on people," he says.

Yet the record shows that the governor has moved to weaken government oversight and responsibility for the environment:

▼ Without public notice, the DEQ changed a rule that limited shipyard discharges of TBT, a highly toxic pesticide used in boat paint to keep the hulls free of barnacles. Joe Maroon, Virginia director for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation,

day, most of it from out of state. Most residents of Bland County don't want it. They traveled to Richmond, testified before legislators, signed petitions, written letters — done all they can, in other words, to heed Governor George Allen's call for Virginians to take an active role in government decisions. At a Republican fundraiser in Roanoke, Allen re-emphasized that "local control" works best. "That's just a fundamental belief — that we can trust people locally."

Yet opponents of the incinerator say the governor doesn't seem to trust the people of Bland County. In keeping with the administration's focus on economic growth and job creation, they say, the state recently loosened rules to allow the incinerator.

When CaseLin first proposed the project, they observe, the county had little power to bar the burner. Opponents looked to Richmond, but the state had no specific standards for medical waste incinerators. With four other applications pending for similar burners across the state, the General Assembly imposed a moratorium on permits until rules were developed.

The Department of Environmental Quality formed an ad hoc group, with industry, technical, environmental, and

citizen representatives, which came up with standards in 1993. The Bland County opponents supported them as strict enough, and were told by DEQ at the time that the CaseLin permit would not pass muster under the rules.

But a law enacted in 1993 delayed adoption of the rules, giving Governor Allen a chance to influence the process. The administration relaxed emission standards for particle dust, carbon monoxide, and other pollutants, as well as requirements for operator training and incinerator design and management.

Opponents of the incinerator were outraged. "I want us to be a pro-business state, but not to the point where we jeopardize the health and welfare of our citizens," says state Senator Jack Reasor, a Democrat from Bluefield. He says two members of the Air Pollution Control Board appointed by the governor tipped the scales to change medical waste incinerator regulations to favor industry.

Administration officials insist the new regulations are based on "sound science" and will protect the environment and public health. "I understand that some of these issues are very emotional," says Secretary of Natural Resources Becky Norton Dunlop. "I just think that, frankly, sometimes emotion carries the

day on environmental policy and sound science gets, frankly, thrown out the window because it is more exciting to focus on controversy than the scientific evidence."

Now, county officials and citizens are facing another battle — whether they have standing to challenge the air permit in court. State law requires they must prove "immediate, financial and substantial" harm in order to have their day in court. Environmentalists say that test is too severe, but Allen staunchly defends it.

"I was raised to believe the government would take care of us," says Belcher. "I hate to say it, but I've lost faith."

Molly Thompson, a longtime Republican and vice chair of the county board of Supervisors, is behind Allen on most issues, but parts company on environmental policies — and especially on the incinerator.

"I really wonder if he knows what it would do," she says. "Should this come to Bland County, then I think all of Virginia needs to be aware of what is permitted. If we get one, you can get one, too."

— *Cathryn McCue*

says the agency "quietly pulled" those limits in a permit renewal for Norfolk Shipbuilding and Drydock Corporation. The state restored the limits only after the federal Environmental Protection Agency and hundreds of citizens voiced objections.

▼ The DEQ stopped cleanup at about 2,000 sites where leaking underground storage tanks had polluted the soil or ground water. Under a new procedure, the agency only enforces cleanup at sites that pose an "immediate risk." The move saves tank owners millions of dollars in cleanup costs, but the pollution at closed sites could come back to haunt future or nearby property owners.

▼ State officials are exploring ways to contract with private vendors to provide services such as camping, restaurants,

and horseback riding at state parks, running fish hatcheries, and advising farmers on erosion and runoff. Handing over government services to industry, critics say, would shift the emphasis from protecting people to generating profits.

▼ The DEQ proposed a change in regulations that would give the agency more discretion over whether to require water polluters to monitor for toxic substances. Critics say the change could mean some companies would get preferential treatment.

▼ The DEQ delayed designation of five western Virginia streams as "pristine" out of concern it would stifle economic growth in the communities where they're located. The stream classification, part of the federal Clean Water Act, would mean that no more pollution could be discharged into the streams.

▼ The administration pushed for an "environmental audit" bill that grants immunity from civil liability to businesses that report environmental violations to the government. The bill passed into law last year — despite objections that it enables polluters to hide problems by making the information they give the government legally privileged.

## SECRECY AND FEAR

Business has applauded efforts to "streamline" regulations. The administration is "moving ahead at a very acceptable pace," says Sandra Bowen, a senior vice president with the state Chamber of Commerce. "Generally, the regulated community is happy with the way it is working so far."

By contrast, citizens concerned about the environment have been locked out of the process. "It's to the point I can't even

get a letter answered," says Ed Clark, director of the Wildlife Center of Virginia.

Last year Peter Schmidt, director of the DEQ, convened three panels to streamline waste, water, and air permits. The panelists included agency staff, consultants, lawyers, and representatives of industry — but no environmental advocates. In a memo, Schmidt indicated the panel recommendations would remain internal policy and not be subject to public comments and hearings.

The public has been further shut out of the process by administrative secrecy. Officials have used the "governor's working papers" exemption of the state Freedom of Information Act to keep many documents confidential — including environmental reports, a DEQ review of 25 regulations, and an "exercise" in which the agency listed programs that could be privatized or eliminated.

Citizens aren't the only ones feeling excluded. Many DEQ employees believe clean air and water are taking a back seat to business needs. A survey of agency employees by legislative auditors found that 67 percent say their morale is fair or poor. Fifty-seven percent say their jobs would be at risk if they made a decision that was legal but upset industry.

David Sligh worked in the Roanoke office of the DEQ for 10 years writing water discharge permits before Allen appointees began applying top-down political pressure. Sligh said he was expected to overlook legal and technical problems in order to issue permits in a timely, friendly manner. "That makes me mad — as a taxpayer and a career government employee," Sligh said. He quit the agency last year to serve as state coordinator of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, a national group.

Others have left as well. A combination of buyouts, layoffs and resignations has left DEQ with about 640 employees, down 20 percent from 1993, and far below the 1,000 positions authorized by the General Assembly when it created the agency.

At least one employee was fired. Don

## *"Business people inherently have business as their first order of business."*

Shepherd had worked 15 years heading the Roanoke regional air office. He was regarded both inside and outside government as a middle-of-the-roader, someone who worked well with industry and who took the protection of Virginia's air quality and public concerns seriously. When Shepherd was fired for revealing an internal disagreement over an air permit for a Radford industry, staffers throughout the agency were stunned — and took the incident as a warning.

"They're scared to death to talk to me," says state Senator Joe Gartlan, a Democrat from Fairfax County. "Morale is a disaster. Workloads are impossible. They simply can't perform."

Becky Norton Dunlop, secretary of natural resources under Allen and a former personnel adviser for Ronald Reagan, dismisses staff problems as a natural consequence of agency cuts. "It is tough on the employees," she says, "but it's not causing a lot of people to not do their jobs."

### **OUT OF STEP**

Allen came into office with high popularity ratings, but public approval has dropped as his hard-right agenda has drawn more scrutiny. He made last fall's mid-term elections a referendum on his governorship, funnelling money from Smithfield Foods and other special interests to local GOP candidates and blanketing the state with TV ads featuring himself. But his bid to win control of

the General Assembly failed.

His cuts in education and social services were the key issues, but there were also clear signs he was out of step with citizens on consumer and environmental issues. One poll conducted last fall asked voters which of three issues was most important: 61 percent picked "strict enforcement of current clean air and water rules"; 24 percent picked "limits on real estate development"; 15 percent picked "cutting regulation to help business."

But the governor continues to cut state regulations — and to appoint some of his biggest campaign contributors to oversee the job. His agenda calls for giving industry more say, often at the expense of consumers. In the case of the car-dealer board, for example, Allen turned to a trade group rather than average car buyers for advice on appointments.

"Every one of these people who I appointed were recommended by the Virginia Automobile Dealers Association," he says. "It's not as if I just picked people out of the air."

The industry group, which represents franchise dealers, gave Allen \$23,600.

Many of those in business consider it natural for the state to turn to them to regulate their own industries. Frank Cowles, a northern Virginia car dealer whom Allen appointed to the Motor Vehicle Dealers Board, has been friends with the governor since they met at a GOP dinner a few years ago. Cowles says he "worked like hell" to get Allen elected to Congress and then worked again to get him into the Governor's Mansion.

Cowles, a lawyer who runs a hardware store and serves on the board of a bank, says he doesn't understand why anyone would fuss about a world-tested businessman being put on the car-dealer board.

"What the hell are you going to do? Appoint somebody who's a hillbilly who doesn't know anything about this business?" he says. "Where is the problem in appointing qualified people?"

§

Mike Hudson and Cathryn McCue are staff writers with The Roanoke Times.



# God Don't Make Mistakes

**A gay man searches for the connection between his spiritual, political, and sexual life.**

**By Stan Holt**

I grew up gay in the Baptist church. Lonely and isolated, I was an emotional orphan. There was no one I could talk to about being gay. My family and the church would condemn me to hell. My friends would ostracize me and tell my family, and I was too ashamed to discuss this hidden part of myself — my true identity. Yet I longed for some sort of connection.

When I was 10 years old, I believed in heaven and hell. Like everybody in church, I wanted to go to heaven, so I worked towards that end. At age 12, I was saved. After accepting Jesus as my savior and devoting my life to God, I knew I would go to heaven. I was connected to God.

Religion soon became a mask I placed in front of my truth. Sunday school followed by a morning church service, Sunday evening services, Wednesday evening prayer meetings, and a two-week revival twice a year was the regimen. I became efficient at listening to the preacher, hearing what he said, and discussing it with other church members. I could pray with the best of them. I understood the rhetoric and used it to my advantage. Yet, it contradicted the feelings I had for other men and the loneliness I felt.

The messages I grew up with were clear. You didn't talk about sex. It was a necessary evil. It was something only two heterosexuals, whose visible love was both acknowledged and blessed, used to procreate. I could never picture the "sisters" and "brothers" in Christ fucking for pleasure. When gay sex was referred to, it was with hate. Homosexuals were nothing more than the devil in the flesh. These messages, both spoken and unspoken, served to isolate and confine the part of me that needed to be connected to other men.

When I was 18, I began exploring what the preacher called "forbidden homosexual acts, lusts of the flesh that destroyed



*Illustration by Jennie Miller*

Sodom and Gommorah and would damn a man's soul straight to hell." Guided by my raging hormones and a hard dick, I sought relief in the few places in rural Missouri where I could meet men — the local park and adult bookstores.

The back room of an adult bookstore tends to be dark and dingy. There is a tangible odor of sweat and cum, and there are rows of small cubicles that show movies. Sexual tension pervades the environment. You can toss in a token or quarter and watch a couple of minutes of porno. The wall between some of the cubicles has a hole, large enough for men to "connect." I started having sex with men through these "glory holes."

At first, the arcades were showing 8-mm movies in each cubicle, and the only sound was the clackety-clack of the film snaking through the mini-projector. The quality of the film,

both the filmstrip and plot, was crude and jumpy. Then there was the switch to VHS video and TV monitors. It was amazing — not only could I watch sex between men, but I could hear it, too.

Sex between the men on these videos was more than I was able to emulate. Sex through the glory hole was without sound, not a sigh uttered — my orgasm was awash in guilt and shame.

I spent years trying to suppress this part of my life. I denied the simplest realities; I didn't have sex — let alone enjoy it — with other men. Many times I would notice other "regulars" from the two bookstores in my hometown. I knew that if I were to acknowledge them, I would be acknowledging the part of myself that did not exist — not really. Through the "glory holes" my need for connection was met, without shattering my counterfeit reality — my double life.

Lesbians and gay men talk about their "double lives." When I was 20, my double life consisted of being the assistant song leader when I was at church, then hitting the bookstore after Sunday evening services. Rather than deal with this dual identity, I spent a lot of time working on my career. In college I would take as many as 18 credit hours, while working 32 hours in the evenings and on weekends. After my certification as a respiratory therapist, I worked 50 to 60 hours a week. School and work were a cakewalk compared to church and sex.

I developed close friendships with both men and women, but I never discussed certain subjects. When friends and family asked about girlfriends, I responded, "It would be very difficult for me to support a wife and family without a stable career, and that is my priority in life right now. If the right person came along, I might reconsider, but until then I have some hard work to do." (How's that for feeding into expected gender roles?)

---

### First Time Out

---

At age 24, I left my rural Missouri hometown and moved to North Carolina for graduate school. I had to get away. I couldn't explain this then, but somewhere inside me I knew that I had to try to find a way to bridge my worlds. I had to connect my heart to my work, my

---

## *When I was 20, my double life consisted of being the assistant song leader when I was at church, then hitting the adult bookstore after Sunday evening services.*

---

sexual identity, my political identity, and my spiritual identity. Being at a school of public health made it easy to work on one of the most pressing public health crises in our times — AIDS — a very real and personal issue for me. Though not out of the closet, I was working with and for gay men. I began bridging my identities.

Despite interweaving the personal and professional and creating a network of supportive friends, I was still not able to "come out." My urge to do so increased over the next six months. I felt like a trapeze artist without a safety net. I was not about to let go of the few friends I had for support without something to catch me.

I spent a summer in Washington, D.C., working in AIDS education at the national headquarters of the American Red Cross. There I saw the positive, pro-active role of the gay community in Washington. I saw a community mobilizing against AIDS. I saw a community proud of itself. I saw a politically active community responding to the unique needs of lesbians and gay men. I began to identify with these new images.

I went to happy hour with a friend from the Red Cross. We were eating barbecued chicken wings and french fries and drinking beer when Peter said, "This is always an awkward question to ask, but are you gay?"

I responded, "Yes, but I've never told anyone." But then, I'd never been asked.

I can't remember the rest of the conversation, but I remember realizing that I

had been honest for the first time in my life. I liked the feeling.

We walked to a gay bar near DuPont Circle, sat outside in a small garden, and talked about he and his boyfriend and about gay things to do in the city. It was the first time I had entered such a world, and I watched as men talked, touched, and laughed. It reminded me of church picnics when friends and family would get together, cook, eat, talk about their families and lives, play softball and Frisbee, and enjoy each other's company. In this gay bar I felt, for the first time in my life, that I belonged. I had something in common with these men, and it was not related to my spiritual mask.

That same week, I got together with one of my best friends from school who also had a summer position in Washington. She and I had spent hours talking about school, life, and what we would do for a job once we graduated. I had been honest once that week, and it felt good, so I wanted to tell her, too. But I got scared. Those same old messages about how wrong it was to be gay crept into my head, and the truth lodged in my throat. It wasn't until we started school again that fall that I told her. She smiled and said, "I wondered when you were going to tell me."

I started telling many of my friends, only to find out they already knew. I found comfort in their support. I even went to the local gay bars for the first time. I enjoyed the freedom of not having to hide my identity in a three-foot by three-foot cubicle.

The first time I went to Boxer's, a local gay bar, I heard about the gay church here, the Metropolitan Community Church. I couldn't believe such a church existed. I went. It was a mix of what I call "high church" with its formal ritual and regalia, and a touch of Pentecostal Holiness, where if the spirit moved you, you literally moved, shouted, and praised the Lord. Unfortunately, neither of these forms of worship made me comfortable because they were too close to my roots in the Baptist church. On the other hand, I had never been in a place where it was O.K. to be gay and seek some sort of spiritual meaning for my life.

I'll never forget a special service hosted

**"I KNEW I NEEDED POLITICAL, SPIRITUAL, SOCIAL, AND SEXUAL CONNECTIONS," SAYS STAN HOLT OF THE JOURNEY THAT TOOK HIM FROM A BAPTIST BOYHOOD TO A LIFE OF ACTIVISM.**



by Reverend Delores Berry, a black lesbian. With her commanding presence, she ministered through song and filled the room with tears of comfort and joy. She said one thing that stuck with me: "God made you who you are, and he don't make mistakes." From that moment on my true spiritual search began.

With the help of the Baptist church and society, I had spent my life creating an emotional impotence that kept me from connecting with a supportive community. The walls of the cubicle in the adult bookstore kept me in fear and isolation. The confines of guilt and shame kept me from building relationships based on sincerity and honesty. At the same time, this emotional impotence became key to my survival. It kept me focused on my life outside of politics, sex, and spirituality. There wasn't isolation and pain in my education, career, and superficial relationships. Separating my sexual and spiritual identity from the rest of my life prevented me from going crazy from the fear and isolation. In fact, I can see the times when avoiding my spiritual and sexual realities stopped me from killing myself or contemplating such an alternative.

How could I change feelings of shame, isolation, and guilt? I knew I needed political, spiritual, social, and sexual connections. It was the beginning of my own journey, and it requires both internal and



external work and support.

### —Homophobia Inside and Out—

The Metropolitan Community Church allowed me to open up and feel like I was not alone. I met gay men and lesbians and started building friendships. My social situation changed tremendously. I went out on dates, had dinner, went to movies, went dancing, and had sex without the walls and a "glory hole." Before long, I even had my first boyfriend. I was 26 years old.

After graduate school, my journey continued with my work as the executive director of the North Carolina Lesbian and Gay Health Project. Being the head of this

small community-based organization gave me a unique and sometimes terrifying vantage point. In my first week of work, state government hearings took up anonymous HIV testing. Should it continue in North Carolina or should names be given to state officials? While testifying against anonymous HIV testing, Dr. Paul Cameron, a psychologist, advocated a quarantine of those with HIV/AIDS under the guise of sound public health. I felt the hatred this man had for those with HIV, not to mention his attitudes towards gay men. It reminded me of the Baptist church and the hatred towards homosexuals.

Growing up in an intolerant church, I

thought I had become numb to the effects of the intolerance and hatred. But the work I was doing tested my fortitude constantly. While teaching medical students about lesbian and gay issues and providing AIDS education in work places, I heard snickers and moral judgments about how wrong it was to be a homosexual.

These interactions exacted an emotional toll. Bigotry and hate stripped away my self-esteem. Because LGHP was the only organization in North Carolina devoted to lesbian and gay issues, I was not only out, but I was a "professional queer," and I needed to learn to deal with homophobia and its manifestations. It was a hard and lonely spot.

I learned to cope with overt homophobia without denial or emotional numbing. Often this meant getting in touch with my emotional wounds, feeling them, and healing them. After the hearings on anonymous testing, I went home, sat in the middle of my bed, felt the hatred and hurt, and cried. At first, this process was difficult for me. I was self-critical and oftentimes felt incompetent. Yet, the next day I would face workers at Duke Power or medical students at the University of North Carolina.

A strong supportive community is necessary to fight bigotry and hatred. I trusted lesbians and gay men. I believed I did not need to protect myself from homophobia among them; I did not need my armor. But I soon found many gay AIDS leaders who wanted to disassociate themselves from the gay community and a gay identity. Several argued that funders, particularly individuals, would not give money to gay men and lesbians. As AIDS became more accepted in the mainstream, they told me we should move away from a lesbian and gay identity.

A fairly prominent gay man came to a board committee meeting to discuss whether he was interested in being on the board. I was unprepared for his comments. He suggested that the only circumstances under which he would join the board of directors would be if the organization changed its name. He argued that "the organization would never become mainstream as long as it had a

---

*As men talked,  
touched, and laughed,  
it reminded me of  
church picnics —  
friends and family  
would get together,  
cook, eat, talk about  
their families and  
lives, play softball and  
frisbee, and enjoy each  
other's company.*

---

name reminiscent of the radical '60s." He defended his position by discussing how "out" he was to his family and at his work place and argued that there were many in the community who felt the same.

I was confused. I felt, once again, like I had sat through a sermon in the Baptist church. I couldn't help thinking to myself, "Homosexuals are worthless, sin-filled, and damned to hell."

Until I came to recognize this man's homophobia, I had this naive conception that "out" gay men and lesbians understood the power dynamics of a patriarchal society. Now that I was out myself, I couldn't imagine gay people assimilating and compromising their identity for individual power. I thought they understood that to attempt to fit the mold of the powerful (Christian, straight, white man) meant moving away from those who do not fit that mold. But as I became closer to the gay community, I found at its core the same oppression and repression that I had known growing up.

The gay community carried its own unspoken definition of a "good gay man" and the "bad gay man." Everyone understood. The good gay man was not effeminate. He did not take a political stance. He never questioned the prevailing power structure or its authority. He

never talked about sex, or if he did, it was clouded with conquest or criticism. He condemned any association with lesbians, and sometimes even protested using the words "lesbian" and "gay," opting to ignore his identification with other individuals. He had a sculpted chest and moussed hair. He declared that being gay should not be and is not a big deal to him. The bad gay man was everybody else.

Take a look at personal ads that say, "Seeking good looking, straight-acting male for friendship, maybe more. No fats or femmes." Listen to conversations where men relegate women to "fish," and any gay man above 50 is an "old troll." Overhear a white man talk about the "monkeys" in the bar tonight. Watch the attractive men at the bar, the number of men who approach them, the glowing response to someone attractive and the snub of the less attractive. Compare the number of gay men who participate in local politics or volunteer with local community organizations with the number of men at the bar on Friday night.

These behaviors are mirrors of our dominant culture, but I had hoped — believed — that gay men would be immune. But why should I be surprised when I saw such characteristics of our culture?

I gained a sense that this rampant and destructive internalized homophobia, coupled with racism and sexism, separates gay men from communities of color, women, cross-dressers, people with disabilities, old gay men, and young gay men. It creates a community unable to open up to the differences that exist within the community. It builds walls, walls that protect but also isolate. I caught glimpses of myself mirrored in the men in this community. I see the same confinement I felt in the three-foot by three-foot cubicle. I see an emotional impotence — an inability to build connections.

Add HIV, I don't want to make things more complicated, but HIV is part of all our lives, especially gay men's. The first time I learned about AIDS, it was a Sunday morning. I was sitting on the floor of my parents' living room, and I was reading the local newspaper. It was the sum-

mer after my high school graduation. The Associated Press had a story about five gay men in the Los Angeles area who had died of pneumocystis pneumonia. I remember thinking, "This will touch me at some point in my life." I was 18.

Eight years later, after many emotionally detached sexual partners, after working in a hospital with persons living with HIV, after acknowledging my gay identity, I had come face to face with the effect HIV had on my life. I struggled with the new walls created by this virus. I have heard gay men say it is scary being a single gay man. It is scary to build relationships with other gay men because you don't know who will live and who will die. I don't know if I will live or die. I am afraid to connect, afraid to lose, afraid to hurt, afraid of being alone — again. I know that loss will be a part of my life. Given the new data about gay men suggesting that between the ages of 20 and 50, there is a 50 percent chance of HIV infection, being alone seems like an unavoidable reality and disconnectedness a repetitive theme in my life.

Which creates so many questions. How do I make and maintain connections? How do I connect the spiritual, sexual, emotional, and political pieces of my life? How do I overcome the fact that disconnectedness has been key to my survival? How can I make my actions and beliefs match? How do I help create and sustain the world I need for this work? How do I connect with other friends, sexual partners and lovers, while maintaining the integrity of my own connections? How do I make new connections with drag queens, African Americans, poor people, and anyone who seems to be different?

## — Fear and Power —

Connecting the pieces of my life and my life with others requires first being truthful in all my relationships and removing masks I still hide behind. With a network of friends and support for my personal work, I can deal with the fear about what lies behind my masks. And I can also deal with the ostracism I feel as I mirror places of pain in other gay men.

In my next step toward achieving connectedness between the parts of my life, I

examine the events that shattered my self-esteem. I remember the messages from church and family that created a sense of worthlessness. I remember boys on the playground calling me "sissy" when I chose to jump rope rather than play baseball.

Their name-calling has made me more attuned to the effects of the snickers and catcalls when I am the "professional queer." Somehow, and I'm not certain how, by opening, acknowledging, and allowing the pain and fear of these events to enter into my life, they lose their power, and I'm able to become more confident and self-assured.

Witches have a saying, "Where there is fear, there is power." In my own life, I am increasingly amazed at how the things that frighten me can create joy and compassion. The fear of losing a friend to HIV/AIDS makes me recognize the importance of our time together and creates a powerful bond. Speaking from my heart at a public meeting is frightening but can liberate and transform me and have an impact on public policy. Telling my personal struggle to a seemingly hostile audience is frightening, but often I am met with empathy and compassion.

Spiritual forces are at work in my life. They are helping me recognize power that moves me beyond fear and pain. These forces are no longer tied to any formal religion, but rather give me a clear sense that everything is connected and valuable. No one judges my goodness or badness — not even God. However, the actions I choose have consequences for me, my relationships, and the world. Those consequences and a sense of integrity are beginning to serve as the basis for my sense of my own value.

In her book, *Dreaming the Dark*, Starhawk, a witch, activist, feminist, and author expresses the vision in which there is no split between the spiritual and the political, and the dualities created by our culture lose their power. Individual integrity and relationships serve as the foundation for justice.

Integrity for myself centers on the value I hold for myself and my sexuality. Imagine what it might have been like for me if sex were considered sacred, beautiful, cherished, and above all respected,

and if communication about sex were considered comparable to the importance of God and the church. I would never have felt fear, shame, or isolation. Instead, I would have been loved, embraced, and supported by my family and community while exploring my feelings about my sexual identity without acting on them in risky ways.

Through my work and its connection to other social justice organizations, I am awed by the personal power created by the community building that comes out of community organizing. In my new role as development director of the Piedmont Peace Project, I watch low-income communities and communities of color take leadership roles and challenge traditional white, male power structures.

I see stories of oppression similar to my own. The recently produced film, "The Uprising of 1934," examines union organizing in textile mills throughout the South and the widespread 1934 textile strike. I felt pieces of my own story as I heard about the union organizers being blackballed and ostracized. I could feel the pain of the workers as they were teased and called "lint heads." It was here that I realized work in the lesbian and gay community cannot occur in isolation.

I have a lot to learn from these folks. They can share their community organizing strategies and teach me how to cope when it seems so hopeless. I can share, in my own way, the pain I have felt by being a member of another oppressed group and how I cope with loss throughout my life. Most importantly, I begin to look at my own self and my integrity. I feel we can provide the mutual support necessary to challenge those who create oppressive systems. **S**

*Before joining the Piedmont Peace Project, the organization that edited the special section in this issue, Stan Holt was development director for the Institute for Southern Studies, which publishes Southern Exposure.*



# Falling Apart/ Coming Together

**W**hen I proposed writing about the efforts of Alternate ROOTS (Regional Organization of Theaters South) to overcome communications' problems, executive director Kathie DeNobriga became alarmed. "We're still in the process," she said, and others in the organization echoed that concern.

They are not alone. Though groups around the South have been exploring ways for people to work together despite differences in race, sex, religion, and sexual orientation, no one seems to have completed the process.

A North Carolina-based group, the Piedmont Peace Project, has been one of the organizations in our region struggling hardest to learn, and they agreed to put together this special section. They began with their own experiences and soul-searching — personally, and as an organization. They branched out to gather stories and lessons from other groups around the South — including Alternate ROOTS, whose members shared a difficult, but creative and meaningful history.

There aren't enough of these conscientious, courageous groups exploring how to work in diverse groups — if there were, we'd have a whole lot of powerful coalitions fighting for social and economic democracy. But there are many more groups seriously grappling with the problems than could be covered in this overview. We hope to foster further discussion on these issues in Southern Exposure. We welcome your ideas.

— Pat Arnow, editor

Can we overcome barriers of race, class, gender, and sexual identity to work together for a just community?

**By Dotye Burt-Markowitz, Stan Markowitz, and the staff of the Piedmont Peace Project**

**T**he abolitionist movement was one of the great progressive reform efforts in United States history. As one of its most able speakers, Frederick Douglass was the answer to the abolitionists' prayers. An escaped slave, self-taught, he was a brilliant writer and orator. He could attack slavery from the perspective of someone who had experienced it, dramatically

challenging the racism that dominated American thinking. He was proud of his voice and his ability to affect people with his eloquence. Yet white abolitionists cautioned him to "keep a little plantation" in his voice, not to sound too smart, because otherwise people would never believe he had ever been a slave.

When Douglass attempted to become more than a speaker for the white abolitionist leaders, when he tried to move into a position of leadership himself, asserting his independence and challenging the unconscious racism he was experiencing among white abolitionists, his relationships with many of the movement's leaders began to "fall apart." Even though their expressed goals were the same, white abolitionists could neither understand what Douglass was experiencing nor accept him as an equal.

The "coming together and falling apart" that characterized the relationship between Frederick Douglass and the white abolitionist movement is a telling example of an experience that has been repeated over and over in progressive movements.

We have always known that we face often overwhelming external barriers in our fight for social justice. Powerful institutions and privileged groups don't want to relinquish control of the laws, formal and informal procedures, and oppressive ways of doing business that serve their self-interests.

But in recent years, those of us who work for progressive social change have begun to recognize that we also face seri-

ous *internal* barriers within our own organizations and psyches — the wrenching and disorienting challenge of working together across barriers of race, gender, class, and sexual identity.

This realization has led many progressive organizations, the Piedmont Peace Project among them, to develop what we call an “anti-oppression” approach to social change. This model reflects our growing awareness that we must address these barriers, along with the recognition that oppression and privileges of all forms are interwoven and cannot be separated. The seeds of this model sprouted in the 1960s and ’70s when women, poor and working class people, and people of color began gaining greater access to academia, the media, and leadership of non-profit, social change organizations.

As new and different voices made themselves heard, white middle-class progressives were forced to take a hard look at themselves and their organizations. Predominantly white, male and

middle-class, their organizations often tacitly or unconsciously accepted the racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic ways of doing business that define life in the United States. Like many of the abolitionists, they assumed they must be the ones to lead oppressed populations into a just society. In fact, the major working class reform movement in this country — the union movement — has also been led predominantly by white men through much of its history and has, with the exception perhaps of class, exploited many of the oppressive behaviors used so skillfully by the companies they are challenging.

The lesson for oppressed groups who joined, either directly or in coalition with these progressive organizations, was that it is dangerous to trust those who say they’re your allies but have a different racial, class, gender or sexual identity. The practical solution for oppressed people has been to create homogenous organizations dedicated to building power for their own constituency.

To break this cycle of separation, many organizations are taking actions to remove the barriers that divide us. Predominantly white middle-class organizations are taking workshops and doing strategic planning with a focus on how to build multi-racial, multi-class groups. Newly established groups are trying to create structures and practices that are inclusive. People from oppressed groups watch to see if real progress is being made. But most of us are very new to this. Our commitment often exceeds our understanding and skill level. We bump up against each other’s wounds and challenge each other’s privileged beliefs. We get angry and frustrated. Questions of how to set priorities, who to ally with, where to draw the line, become infinitely more complex and wrought with potential for conflict — for “falling apart.”

When it was formed 10 years ago, the Piedmont Peace Project created a structure to combat the dynamics of oppression. Internalized oppression — the acceptance of negative stereotypes about

# Crossing the Line

The Piedmont Peace Project builds bridges between different groups in their community.

## Interview by Laurie Schecter

*In 1985, Linda Stout, a native of the Piedmont region of North Carolina, and currently director of the Peace Development Fund, founded the Piedmont Peace Project. At the time, no organization existed in the area that brought black and white low-income people together for progressive change. It was PPP's perspective that outside organizers — primarily white, college-educated, and middle class — could not create such an organization. It would have to be the unique creation of local people who knew race and class issues from their own life experience.*

*Ten years later, PPP is a potent political force in the Piedmont and Sandhills region of North Carolina. Working together, PPP members have brought home more than \$2 million in community development block grants, and they have registered more than 15,000 voters. Through these efforts, hundreds of once-silent people have found their voices and entered into a dialogue with other constituencies in the community — and on the national scene — to work toward constructive political change. The “Finding Our Voices” model PPP developed led to a national training program that is now helping other low-income Southern communities to empower themselves.*

### Members of the Piedmont Peace Project who are interviewed:

**Connie Leeper** is a single parent, activist, and lifelong resident of Kannapolis, North Carolina. An African American, she is the daughter of textile mill workers and has been an organizer with the Piedmont Peace Project since 1990.

**Onaje Benjamin**, a trainer/organizer with PPP, is the son of a factory worker and a food service worker. An African American who grew up in New York’s Harlem, he has been incarcerated various times. He became an activist and community organizer in social justice movements and is now a nationally recognized trainer and counselor for men and youth in the areas of anti-oppression and anti-sexism.

**Brenda Brown** is a lifelong resident of Jackson Hamlet in Moore County, North Carolina (one of the sites Piedmont Peace Project has helped revitalize with community organizing and block grants). A church and community activist, Brown has been a PPP organizer for a year. She is African American.

**George Friday** was born in Gastonia, North Carolina, not far from PPP headquarters. The daughter of a truck driver and a schoolteacher, she has worked as a yoga teacher and as a fundraiser for Sane Freeze. She is a nationally recognized trainer in the anti-racism and community development fields. An African American, she has been a trainer and consultant with PPP since 1990.

*Interview begins on page 22*

ourselves — often prevented women, people of color, poor and working-class people, and gays and lesbians from recognizing and acting on their potential. We believed that organizing for social change meant including and drawing leadership from voices that have been historically excluded from sharing power in our society. The by-laws require that at least two-thirds of the board must be low-income, women, and people of color. We evaluated community organizing campaigns in terms of how they dealt with issues of race, class, gender, and sexual identity. We built an unusual relationship with a donor community in Massachusetts who not only provided financial support, but also participated in one of our training programs to confront issues of class and white privilege. We built feminist principles of self-nurturance and personal growth into our methods of operation.

All of us — staff, board, members, donors, consultants — thought we were doing great work. We *were* doing great

work in the external world — work that made a real difference in people's lives and communities. We successfully registered and turned out thousands of voters and convinced our U.S. Congressional Representative Bill Hefner to dramatically change his voting record. We helped local residents in three rural neighborhoods win more than \$2 million in community development block grants to rehabilitate housing, pave roads, and bring in running water and sewers. Other communities are now engaged in the same process of revitalization. We helped show the connections between local and national issues by interviewing local people and using their words to create pamphlets which were then circulated in the community. We put community building — the bringing together of allies across barriers of race, class, gender, and sexual identity — at the center of our organizing and training models.

Yet for all our organizing success, we found our approach much easier to describe than to live. For instance, many of

our members come from religious backgrounds that teach that homosexuality is sinful. Yet, they had become part of an organization whose stated philosophy is that to deny rights to people because they are gay or lesbian is the same as denying rights to people because of the color of the skin or their gender. The struggle to resolve the contradictions between members' religious teachings and the organization's mission caused some folks to leave — but the great majority stayed and ended up accepting PPP's position. Other issues created similar crises — men resisting shared leadership with women, people who were not Christian challenging the assumption that meetings should always open with a Christian prayer. The struggles were hard, but they strengthened the organization and helped clarify our purpose.

While these issues were dealt with openly and successfully among the board and membership, what crept up on us and then hit us hard was our fail-

*continued on page 24*

**Southern Exposure:** What is the Piedmont Peace Project? How do you define your mission?

**Brenda Brown:** We are an organization of people committed to changing conditions in our communities. PPP has a staff of six, and about 500 other folks who work with us around the 8th Congressional District of North Carolina. This is a huge area about the size of Massachusetts. We are mainly textile mill and other types of factory workers. PPP helps low-income people develop the self-esteem and political skills necessary to improve their neighborhoods — according to their own vision of community.

**S.E.:** Is your work strictly limited to North Carolina?

**George Friday:** No. We have a national training program. It's made up of two different programs — one called Finding Our Voices, for low-income political activists like ourselves, and the other, Building Bridges, for people from privileged backgrounds. Both of these programs are based on organizing principles we've developed and used with a lot of success locally.

**S.E.:** What goes on in Finding Our Voices training?

**George Friday:** The program is designed to overcome "internalized oppression," a condition oppressed people often end up with after a lifetime of absorbing society's negative messages. Somehow you're not as good, as smart, as worthy as others. Internalized oppression usually makes low-income folks, women, and people of color doubt themselves and give up their power. We challenge the stereotypes and teach people to value their own history, culture, and personal strengths. We suggest non-traditional, shared leadership styles. Ultimately, we help identify political issues, goals, and strategies for improving each community we work with. All this takes a series of on-site visits and workshops over a three-year period.

**S.E.:** How about Building Bridges?

**Brenda Brown:** Building Bridges takes a three-year commitment,

too. It reaches out to folks with advantages based on skin color, economics, gender, or sexual preference — people already involved in social change. We help participants understand privileges many of them never knew they had — and how their privileges are manipulated to keep us apart. We explain how privilege can be used in positive ways to make institutional changes.

**S.E.:** Can you give us an example of that?

**George Friday:** Say you are a white male professor with tenure: You could get yourself appointed to a key university hiring committee. You could make sure justice was done there.

Another point I'd like to add about Building Bridges groups. Most of them are paired with Finding Our Voices groups — even though the workshops are mainly separate. Building Bridges groups form these relationships to put new learning into practice. The goal of Building Bridges and Finding Our Voices are exactly the same — to build community across race, class, and other lines that keep us divided.

**Brenda Brown:** Our vision is not to mute anyone's voice — not middle-class white people, not black men, not anyone. We're all in this together. We can't make major changes alone.

**S.E.:** You say that much of the work is based on successes at home in North Carolina. Can you give us an example?

**Connie Leeper:** Since the very beginning of PPP 10 years ago, we have always had strong financial support from affluent white people in the Boston area. Even though it doesn't fit our organizing model to have outsiders organize in our neighborhoods, we see the Boston folks as an important part of the PPP community — necessary to make our organizing possible and to create change on the national level. We wanted our Boston supporters to understand exactly what goes on here. If they had a chance to come down and meet our members, we figured they would





**SOME OF THE PIEDMONT PEACE PROJECT STAFF GATHER AT THEIR HEADQUARTERS IN KANNAPOLIS, NORTH CAROLINA. TOP ROW FROM LEFT: STAN HOLT, NANCY BATES ONAJE BENJAMIN, CONNIE LEEPER, JESSE WIMBERLEY, ANGELA PLUMMER. BOTTOM ROW FROM LEFT: GEORGE FRIDAY, LAURIE SCHECTER, BRENDA BROWN.**

get even more connected.

Spring Tour, as we came to call it, was one of our first community-building strategies with our donors. Each year about a dozen people come for a long weekend, and we bring them into our neighborhood to see the way things are. They attend community events, church services, and afterward we treat them to a country breakfast of ham and grits.

What we didn't anticipate was how hard all this could be on us. For instance, one of our staff members was riding with a group that pulled up to an event in one of our communities. One woman said, "Should we lock all the doors?" Later there were comments about our food — too greasy; how come everything has to be seasoned with pork?

Early on we tried to do a formal workshop at the end of the weekend looking at barriers between us — but the visitors got too defensive. Finally we changed to more of a coffee-hour type informal discussion. We asked each person (including staff attending the meeting) to write down the five stepping stones in their lives that got them to Spring Tour. Then we invited people to identify the barriers in their own lives that prevent them from doing social change work.

We lost one person after a weekend like this, but in general, Spring Tour has worked, and the benefits have gone both ways.

**George Friday:** One of the lessons we learned from Spring Tour is that people from the same background need separate, safe spaces where new learning can take place. In Building Bridges Workshops, we have heard stories of deep personal pain from people who grew up in wealthy families. We acknowledge those hurts, and we also help people see that their pain is different from systematic oppression backed by institutions. When folks have a chance to deeply examine how both privilege and internalized oppression work, they can meet people different

from themselves on common ground. As it stands now, a good number of our Boston donors have gone through Building Bridges programs we organized in Massachusetts.

**Onaje Benjamin:** After people have had time to work in a safe space, then we can bring everyone together for a dialogue. But not until that point. Which brings up the example of our gender work. We started with a few focus groups, for lack of a better word, to set the stage. One was a group of about 16 African-American men from ages 30 to 70. The other was a group of African American men below 35. We said to each group, "It appears that women are at the forefront of social change in this region. Where are the men? What are some of the barriers that prevent you from working together as equals with your partners? What is difficult about being an African-American male in the South?" We kicked all this around; then basically listened to what they said.

The older men reflected a lot on their grandmothers, how much they had done and still did. There was a lot of emotion. They talked about their distance from their own fathers and how fragile the economic status of African-American men in the South was, how shut down they had to be at the workplace, and how they had to mask their anger there. With the younger men, their armor was much more up. Their language was very sexist. At one of the meetings with the older men, a guy backed away from me a little. Later he told me he thought I was going to hug him. I decided to take a shot that night and get men thinking. I wanted to explain that fear of each other — it's homophobia — is part of the oppression that keeps men from working together. At the end of the session, the guy who moved away from me said, "What the heck!" and he hugged me. We all hugged each other. Then he said, "I have to go home and hug my son."

*continued on page 24*

ure to pay attention to how oppression was operating among the staff. While we would never support the idea of a hierarchy of oppression (a belief that one kind of oppression is more primary or important than another), we found that we were paying more attention to class issues and avoiding some of the painful issues of racism within the staff. Shared leadership and new definitions of "leaders" were cornerstones of our organizing strategy. Yet we found it difficult to break down traditional patterns of leadership that we thought we had rejected.

Over the years, resentments deepened, and the organization came close to falling apart. PPP did not fall apart. We took the time to look honestly at the roots of our problems and work together to solve them. This has been and continues to be a very difficult process. Still, we are more resolved than ever in our commitment to an anti-oppression community-building approach to organizing because our experience has made it very clear that without such an approach, a truly progressive agenda will not succeed.

The issues that brought PPP to the brink of falling apart are not unique. In this issue of *Southern Exposure* you will read about struggles to create bridges across the barriers that divide us. We

include inspirational successes and painful setbacks. The stories raise many questions and promise no pat answers. Yet we know the work in our communities must continue whether we are organizers or writers or artists. We also know that to make the kind of commitment to each other that brings justice we must try to understand and value each other's experiences.

So here we are — women and men of all races and classes and ages and abilities and sexual identities — in the fray. Our coming together will almost always involve some falling apart. What honest, meaningful, and equitable relationship doesn't? The more we succeed in coming together, the better we can work in coalition and alliance — and beyond — to community, a community with real political, economic, and social democracy.

S  
E

*Dotty Burt-Markowitz and Stan Markowitz are consultants with Piedmont Peace Project.*

The entire staff of the Piedmont Peace Project worked on the special section, "Falling Apart/ Coming Together," providing ideas, perspective, and feedback. Besides those writing the articles in the section and those participating in the interview, they include:

*Jane Wholey, editorial coordinator for this special section, has been PPP's media consultant since 1990. She lives in New Orleans. She has devoted her professional career to helping grassroots groups speak on their own behalf in the media.*

*Angela Plummer is managing director of administration at PPP. She was born and raised in Charlotte (part of the Piedmont). She worked previously for seven years in the U.S. Army.*

*Stan Holt is development director of PPP. Previously he was development director at the Institute for Southern Studies and executive director of the North Carolina Lesbian and Gay Health Project. He lives in Durham, North Carolina.*

*Nancy Bates is a development associate at PPP. She moved to Kannapolis (where PPP has its headquarters) from the Boston area two years ago. Her past professional experiences are in business and art.*

**Piedmont Peace Project  
406 Jackson Park Rd.  
Kannapolis, NC 28083  
(704) 938-5090**

The gender work is about moving men into a place where they can enter a partnership with women to do social change. But first we have to move men to a point where they can see their own shadow.

**Connie Leeper:** We are working on the women's part of the gender issue, too. We started a women's group that includes both low- and middle-income members.

**Onaje Benjamin:** Before you get to the goal of partnership, you have to start building trust across the genders. Ideally, about six months after a men's group and a women's group begin, you bring the two groups together for something very safe — like a dinner and a discussion about gender roles and how they're played out in society. Maybe the women would talk and the men would just listen.

**S.E.:** Back to Building Bridges for a moment: Tell us more about what you do with affluent activists — "people of privilege" as you call them.

**George Friday:** Well, remember our work takes place over a period of three years. And unlike the informal ways that work for Spring Tour, we have a formal curriculum. It includes discussion, a lot of interactive exercises, some formal lecture, and a list of books and articles to read. We spend time examining racism, and how it is far more than personal prejudice — it's preju-

dice with institutions behind it to keep it in place.

**S.E.:** Can you point to any concrete success in the Building Bridges program?

**Brenda Brown:** I'll give you a recent example. This December, we had a huge 10th year anniversary celebration for PPP in Boston. There were several activities including a dinner dance for about 200 donors. We sent 26 from North Carolina including staff and members. All of us stayed at the home of donors — just about all of them had been through Spring Tours and Building Bridges programs.

Once I was very reluctant to stay at a donor's house when I did fundraising in Boston. I went way out of my way to stay with relatives. For me, the trust was not there. This time, things were really different. The hostess gave us the keys — two black women and a black man she barely knew. We spent a lot of time with her. We even laughed openly about the differences between a Boston breakfast — fruit cup and a piece of toast — and our grits, ham, and eggs.

At the dinner dance, all of us from PPP were able to relax and cut up. We felt trusted; we didn't have to live up to anyone's expectations. There's sure no better way to build community than to let people be themselves.

*Laurie Schechter, Training Program Coordinator, was a member of the PPP donor community in Boston before joining the staff as a full-time volunteer.*



# A Bridge Not Yet Built

## Reflections of a low-income white man.

BY JESSE WIMBERLEY

I am a 37-year-old white man, low-income, the father of four children. I live on a small farm in rural North Carolina with my wife and kids. We live in the home my great-grandparents built when they arrived here in a covered wagon 125 years ago. Like many of my neighbors and cousins, I cannot support my family from the land the way our ancestors did. I have been unusually lucky to hang on to my family property and escape work at the local hosiery mill. Instead I travel around the county as an organizer, helping low-income people develop political skills. Black neighborhoods in Moore County are often receptive to social change, and welcome progressive ideas. But in white working class neighborhoods like my own, the “communist” notions of community organizing are not yet welcome — even from a native son.

Last spring, my wife and I took a walk near our farm. We came upon my cousin Bob and five other neighbors in a pickup truck. Although I didn’t know it, they had just finished planting a nearby field with watermelons. I said hello and asked what they were doing.

“Waiting for the law,” Bob said.



JESSE WIMBERLEY

In neighborhoods like my own, the “communist” notions of community organizing are not yet welcome — even from a native son.

"Why?" I asked.

"For baiting coons," he said. The rest of them giggled.

It took me a minute, but soon I understood. It's illegal to plant food expressly to bait wild animals. And black people, so local white people say, are crazy about watermelons.

"O.K.," I said. And I thought to myself, "There's a lot of work to be done."

The exchange was typical of how my neighbors and cousins in rural Moore County greet each other. Verbal connection is made with racist, sexist, or homophobic references that are meant to be humorous. Community in our area is often built upon an acknowledgment of what we stand *against*. Not only are we against equality with blacks, we are against Mexicans, homosexuals, and abortion.

Community for us has also been built on an understanding of the place of neighbors who, out of necessity, came round several times a year to help harvest the crops, shuck corn, and slaughter pigs. Until the end of the Great Depression and the beginning of World War II, mutual economic dependence was the cornerstone around which good times could grow. Shared work whetted everyone's appetite for food, drink, gossip, and square dancing once the sun went down.

The loss of independent farm culture rocked us out of our place in the universe. We — particularly the men — looked for someone outside of ourselves to blame for the frustration and anger. Using the racism, sexism, and homophobia that already existed in the community we found convenient scapegoats.

My cousin Bob and his wife are examples of what has happened over the years to white working-class people in our area. Bob and Hilda live in a trailer. They own no land, and both of them work in the hosiery factory. This summer when Bob and I grew watermelons together on my farm, we talked about how life used to be and how someday we'd buy a tractor between us. This would help Bob realize his dream, which he described to me practically in tears — his own land, enough soil to grow food for

## The loss of independent farm culture rocked us out of our place in the universe.

his family, and an end to the job at the hosiery factory.

That dream is way out of reach. Family farms dried up here in the '60s, '70s and '80s because government agricultural policies radically changed to support agribusiness. And just as it happened with so many people around the United States, one by one by one, the small family farms vanished. Farmers sought economic refuge in nearby factories. Now that refuge is drying up as well.

The global economy also hit low-income wage earners right between the eyes. Not only are foreigners coming into town, some of our factories are moving. We recently lost 500 jobs when a Proctor Silex plant ran away to Mexico. Without an understanding of GATT and NAFTA, rumors offer locals the only explanations. My cousin Bob believes our economic problems are caused by Jews and other people he does not understand.

That day last summer when Bob and I were planting watermelons, we fantasized about a shared future — a farm big enough to support both our families. "Wouldn't it be great?" said Bob. "But let's not hire any Mexicans."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because they're taking our jobs," he said.

"Is that right? How is that?" I pressed him. "I don't know," he said.

"Do you think maybe that plants are closing in Mexico, and there aren't any jobs?" I asked. "Or maybe jobs there don't pay enough for folks to take care of their families, and they come here thinking it's the land of opportunity? Could it be that it's not so different from our own ancestors who felt they had to leave Ireland in the 1800s?"

Here was a set of circumstances Bob could understand. The Mexicans were poor, just like him. The company where Bob works had not tried to establish common bonds among the locals and the Mexicans — if anything, the foremen seemed to play on the cultural differences. The idea that guys from a foreign country were pouring in to take over their jobs had created more frustration and anger than ever.

Low-income white men had bought the idea of the American dream: If I am good enough, if I can only work hard enough, I will live in the lap of luxury. If I have not achieved the American dream for myself, why not? How come I'm such a loser? Our religion reinforces these feelings. Christianity tells us we are responsible for the support of our families. If we just scrape by, we're to blame for our own misery. This kind of thinking creates an overwhelming sense of loss.

Politicians exploit the sense of loss. They provide us an acceptable way to knock someone other than ourselves. We blame the welfare moms. We blame immigrants. The blaming becomes the substance of our greetings; and our greetings become a metaphor for the vacuum we have filled with hate.

I do not try to meet every racial slur that comes my way with a counter statement. Often I register no reaction and move to another subject. Folks who find this politically incorrect are right — it is. But it's real life for a person who wants to live and make changes in a small community such as mine. What works is a combination of maintaining neighborly relations and seizing the "teachable mo-

Low-income white men had bought the idea of the American dream: If I am good enough, if I can only work hard enough, I will live in the lap of luxury. If I have not achieved the American dream for myself, why not?

ment," as organizers say — like a quiet conversation with my cousin Bob. And in these conversations, I do not challenge Bob's belief systems. I challenge his information. With this approach, the Bobs of this country can see they have more in common with a Mexican machinist than with a U.S. factory owner.

If progressives — who mostly come from middle- and upper-class homes — want to reach the hundreds of thousands of low-income white men in this country, they must first affirm that pain and loss exists in these communities. (Affirmation should not be mistaken for endorsement or release from responsibility.) Low-income white men, on the other hand, need to know they enjoy some privileges other Americans do not.

For me, getting that far was a challenge. It was hard to admit that despite my desperate economic situation, I was born with some privileges: I'm white, I'm male, I'm straight. For these reasons, I am afforded a certain amount of respect and attention. It is a struggle not to use these unearned privileges to my advantage in relationships with women and people of color.

When a man has so little control of his life, using privilege to keep others down feels mighty good. As long as we keep holding onto our illusions of power, we don't even look at the larger issues of what's happening to the economy, for instance, policies that allow runaway corporate profits and declining worker wages, job security, health, and safety conditions. It is the low-income white man who votes for North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms and other southern conservatives who support such policies. These politicians use inflammatory race and gender issues to keep us from recognizing

what we have in common with others. We are then unwilling to form coalitions that pressure for sound economic policy. Without those coalitions, the life Bob and I envisioned that warm day last summer is simply impossible.

Here's a dream that comes to mind: A facilitator of some sort — minister, workshop leader or community organizer — brings a small group of low-income men in my area together. There in a safe space, folks vent their pain, prejudice, and anger. They identify and fully acknowledge a long list of wounds. Over a period of time, the group leader brings the men to see how these open wounds affect interactions with others.

At this point the group is encouraged to take a bold new step — to invite some newcomers to join them for an evening — and actually enjoy their differences. Ultimately the men work together to create a positive and inclusive vision of life in our community.

The group leaders I envision to do this work are men like myself — different, yes, but from low-income backgrounds. Right now we are the only ones who will be trusted in a community such as mine. And without trust, expect no true conversation.

Ultimately, the hopelessness and powerlessness of white, rural low-income men will need to be addressed by society at large. The rage that emanates from communities like mine should be redirected toward the true source of our problems — a corporate system and a government that doesn't care about our problems. This is not just my selfish wish — one man desperately seeking to overhaul one isolated rural community. If progressive politics are to succeed in the United States, we will need vast numbers of us from *all* walks of life. That means my family and neighbors, too.

Before they can be reached, there's a long bridge to cross — and it's not yet built.

§

*Jesse Wimberley has been a community organizer with the Piedmont Peace Project for seven years. He worked previously as a naturalist, environmental educator, and researcher.*



The Alternate ROOTS dilemma

# From Little Black Sambo to Son of White Man

Southern theaters work toward ending racism, sexism, and homophobia. But sometimes their efforts backfire.

By **Pat Arnow**

**T**he problem wasn't that performer Ed Haggard took off his clothes during his one-person show, a section he called "I'm too white," and smeared his body with blue paint. It was what he said while he was doing it. He said that if he had more color, he might have a sense of rhythm, a love of nature. He painted his genitals

and said if he had more color he might be more virile.

Haggard was excerpting a few scenes from "Son of White Man" at the Alternate ROOTS (Regional Organization of Theaters South) annual meeting, aiming to get comments and bookings. He had performed the show about growing up in Nashville, Tennessee, to good reviews at

fringe theater festivals across Canada and around the U.S. Last summer, when he tried it out at the meeting of grassroots performers and theaters, someone in the audience booed. No one had ever booed before.

Another man, Cedric Maurice, a black dancer from Atlanta, shouted, "That shit was fucked, Ed!"



ACTOR ED HAGGARD AS "SON OF WHITE MAN"

It wasn't the first time the audience erupted over racial stereotypes after a performance at a ROOTS annual meeting. The weeklong gatherings in the mountains are intended to create a safe place for performers to try out new work, but over the years the scene has sometimes become fractious.

### Political Theater

Alternate ROOTS is a noble experiment that keeps bumping into its own politics. The "Alternate" in their title represents their vision or attitude; they are emphatically not mainstream. According to most universities and museums, art transcends politics and social conditions. Political art isn't art. To those in ROOTS, art is always political. A stark metal sculpture or a painting of Elvis Presley on black velvet reflects and amplifies the class and culture from which it comes. ROOTers not only accept the political in art, they embrace it. They create art to build awareness, understanding, coalitions, and fires in their communities. At the same time they've tried to make an organization that serves artists from different races, backgrounds, and sexual orientations. They have struggled on both counts.

Nearly 20 years ago, the research and organizing school, Highlander Center in East Tennessee, hosted the organizing meeting for Alternate ROOTS. For years Highlander had provided civil rights, labor, and environmental groups a seedbed to organize for social change.

The Appalachian playwright and poet Jo Carson coordinated the meeting, inviting every theater organization she could think of in the South: university theater departments, community theaters, and professional companies that created original plays in their communities rural, urban, black, mountaineer. They included groups like Roadside Theater from Whitesburg, Kentucky, a troupe that made drama from local stories, and Carpetbag Theater from Knoxville, Tennessee, telling of the African-American experience.

The universities and community theaters stayed away from the next meeting. The small innovative theaters returned. It had been lonely work for these scattered

## She became a Sunday school teacher in the "Rock 'o' My Soul in the Bosom of Just About Anybody Except a Minority Baptist Church."

groups. In the early days "we barely knew that we were part of a long tradition of people's theater," said Dudley Cocks, director of Roadside, in *High Performance*, a magazine of "contemporary issues in art, community and culture." In Alternate ROOTS they found a sense of community and a place to show work to their peers, to share experiences, and help get grants to keep on going.

John O'Neal was an early member of ROOTS and served as board chair in the 1980s. He had established the Free Southern Theater in 1963 out of his civil rights work in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. "Our objective was to make art that supported and encouraged those involved in the Southern freedom movement by, for, and about black people," he said. He found in ROOTS "different constituencies in an exciting dialogue (about) ways they could contribute to each other's development. It was exciting to participate, exciting for audiences. It had forms of energy that the movement had."

Over the years, Alternate ROOTS expanded to include individual performing artists, writers, musicians, directors, and visual artists. Today there are 71 member theaters and 109 individual members (who do not belong to a company). An office in Atlanta and a small staff help members to find places and funding for performances and to create partnerships with schools and community groups. The staff has put together an occasional theater festival, and they organize the annual summer meeting that brings together nearly 200 members, aspiring members, friends, and children. Usually they meet on the grounds of the former

art school, Black Mountain College in North Carolina, a rustic mountain camp. There they try out new material, commiserate about funding, and dance, sing, eat, play — and whether they had planned to or not — argue.

### Bomb I

Nine years ago at an annual meeting in the North Georgia mountains, a performance jarred everyone's complacency and sense of shared purpose.

Margaret Baker wanted to try out some of the characters she was developing — this was aside from acting with the Road Company in Johnson City, Tennessee. In one short piece, she became a Sunday School teacher in the "Rock 'o' My Soul in the Bosom of Just About Anybody Except a Minority Baptist Church." In a broad satire, the white actor told the story of Moses and mixed it up with the story of Little Black Sambo.

Most of the ROOTS' audience responded warmly. "I was laughing at it," remembered ROOTS executive director Kathie deNobriga, who is white.

In the feedback sessions, two black members of the audience who were attending a ROOTS meeting for the first time, playwright Pearl Cleage and performer Zeke Burnette, expressed outrage. They were offended and hurt at the use of a hateful racial stereotype. Using a cultural image like Little Black Sambo carried with it more power than Baker had understood, they explained. Most offensive to them was that the largely white audience had laughed at the performance.

"Pearl and Zeke and several other African-American members of the audience for Margaret's piece were thunderstruck that they were in an audience which had been presented as anti-racist who were laughing at things they perceived as racist," explained Bob Leonard, co-artistic director of the Road Company and one of the founding members of ROOTS. "My perception was that Margaret lit what she thought was a sparkler, and it was a hand grenade."

The discussion was painful. Baker cried, and the critics said that her tears took the focus away from the issue she had raised. This shouldn't be about her,

but about what had been unleashed. They had been hurt, a deep cultural hurt that extended back 400 years. They wanted that hurt acknowledged.

It was a transforming day for some of the white people in ROOTS. "What I can remember was this big field, and a couple of people spoke with a great deal of passion and anger and said we were all racist. Words weren't minced at all," said Christine Murdock of the Road Company. She remembered Cleage saying, "My friends back in Atlanta told me I was crazy to go to the North Georgia hills and hang out with a bunch of white people."

"There was a lot of collective white guilt. There was also the horror of realizing I had no idea. It was just a heartache," said ROOTS director Kathie deNobriga.

Margaret Baker said she cried for such a long time that "somebody went and got John O'Neal, and he knelt down in front of me, and he said, 'Margaret, you are not the cause of racism in this world.' He said, 'You're good, but you're not that good.'"

The wounds ran deep. Cleage and Burnette left and never returned to ROOTS, though they have remained performers in the South.

"I think what was so emotionally devastating for me was the people I wanted to defend I ended up offending," said Baker recently. "I think I came out of it with a clearer understanding of why Whoopi Goldberg is perfectly fine to say certain things it isn't too cool for me to say. Now I realize why it was offensive." She has not and will not perform the piece again, and, for better or worse, she will "never, never, never" address race in her work again.

The lessons for some of the other white audience members that day altered ROOTS' — route.

## Rerouting Roots

After hours of discussion following Baker's performance, the members drafted a resolution that the executive committee deal with racism when discussing and planning programs. In the early '90s, ROOTS began to hold racism workshops and seminars at its annual meetings.

**"I think what was so emotionally devastating for me was the people I wanted to defend I ended up offending."**

The members also added a provision to the rules that those wishing to join must say how their work related to the social and economic justice goals in ROOTS' mission statement. Until then, the organization had operated on the dictum elegant in its simplicity: "Who comes, is." Any individual or group who attended a meeting could stand for membership if they came back to the annual meeting the next year. The openness meant that newcomers often disrupted ongoing discussions, and that continued to be a problem.

Almost every summer, another incident upset and alienated people. A conflagration erupted in 1989 when a white woman who has made a career of African drumming, stood for membership. That year, Deborah Hills, a black labor-based organizer, had come to do workshops. As drummer Beverly Botsford described how she would carry out the mission, Hills "just stopped the meeting and took her finger and pointed it at Beverly and spoke a curse, stating that drumming is a male African activity, stating that no woman should drum, and no white woman should drum, and when anybody does, they are calling up the horror of the gods," remembered Bob Leonard.

"It was like somebody stabbing a knife in my heart and twisting it in," said Botsford. Paula Larke, an African-American woman who also drummed, "threw a conga across the room and stormed out," said Botsford. "The whole meeting just fell apart."

The challenge brought up issues of cultural appropriation. Should Botsford practice an art from a different culture? Who can adapt and revise traditions?

The group's sympathies generally stayed with the women who drummed, but "It was a very rough encounter with no resolution. We managed only to get through the week. Beverly was accepted in despite this curse," said Leonard.

## A Six-Step Program — or — Process Process Process

ROOTS needed a way to resolve hot situations. Part of the solution came with a method to critique performances. For the past several years, a white dancer, Liz Lerman, had been developing what she called the "critical response process" to give fellow artists feedback in a useful, non-threatening way. Along with other groups around the country, ROOTS adopted the method in 1993.

"We've always had trouble with how we critique each other. The point of it is to help the artist," said the Road Company's Christine Murdock.

A facilitator who knows the process is necessary. The first step is praise from the audience because "people want to hear that what they have just completed has meaning to another human being," wrote Lerman in an article about her process in *High Performance*. She doesn't recommend a comment like "that is the greatest thing ever," but does suggest "words such as 'when you did such-and-such, it was surprising, challenging, evocative . . .'"

In the second step, the artist asks questions, and these must be specific, for instance, "Did that hat fit the character?" "When the artist starts the dialogue, the opportunity for honesty increases," wrote Lerman.

In the third step, the audience asks the questions, which must be phrased in a neutral way. "Instead of saying, 'It's too long,' a person might ask, 'What were you trying to accomplish in the circle section?'" explained Lerman. While this might seem a "ridiculous task if criticism is the point," Lerman said, the nonjudgmental approach is much more useful to the artist than unbridled opinions. "I can say whatever is important through this mechanism, and what I can't say probably couldn't be heard, or isn't relevant," wrote Lerman.

The fourth step is what Lerman calls



"Opinion Time." Here the audience may say what they think, but they must first ask if the artist wants to hear it. "I have an opinion about the use of nudity in the last scene. Do you want to hear it?" is the structure that Lerman uses. This method keeps the artist in control of the process.

The session generally ends after "Opinion Time," but two steps can be used when more discussion seems called for:

Step five is "Subject Matter Discussion." Here the audience and artist can talk about the content of the work. The performance may also inspire stories and memories that audiences can share at this time.

Step six, "Working on the Work," involves digging into the actual structure, revising specific parts, and trying out new ideas.

The feedback works particularly well among groups of fellow artists, such as those at the ROOTS annual meetings, and over the past three years, ROOTers have embraced the process.

It has taken adjustment. At the 1994 annual meeting, a group including Adora Dupree, an African-American storyteller who is also chair of the ROOTS board of directors, presented a case study of the "Selma Project." This was a collaboration developed with Bob Leonard of the Road Company along with the director of the arts council in Selma, Alabama, who is, like Leonard, a white man. Seven artists, black and white, came from around the South to work with Selma agencies. Children produced poetry books and performances with artists coordinating.

"Bridges were made between black and white arts groups," said Leonard, who also teaches directing at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg.

Dupree found herself in an uncomfortable spot when some black people at ROOTS described Leonard and the Selma arts council representative as "'two white boys exploiting the black community.' I took great offense at that because I was one of the artists, and I



CEDRIC MAURICE OBJECTS TO STEREOTYPES IN THE PLAY "SON OF WHITE MAN."

"I've never been overtly slapped in the face with anything as overtly offensive as what I thought I was seeing."

didn't feel exploited at all," said Dupree. She felt that her involvement informed how the project was carried out.

The critical response process, meant for feedback after performances, wasn't planned, but the group agreed to try it out before the situation became too volatile. The facilitator, who didn't understand the process very well "started to depart from the critical response facilitation because she felt it was keeping people from saying things they wanted

to say," said Dupree.

That is the idea, though, explained the storyteller. When people say exactly what they want, they can become too hot, too personal. The process provides a way to give the artist information about how a piece comes across, not a way to vent anger. Anger has not proved useful.

Because the discussion was beginning to spin out of control, Dupree asked a more experienced facilitator to continue the discussion, but there had been damage.

### Bomb II

"Son of White Man: the Naked Truth" by Ed Haggard could have been designed to test how far Alternate ROOTS had come. Just the day before the performance, the New Orleans-based People's Institute for Survival and Beyond had conducted an anti-racism workshop. ROOTers were sensitized and ready.

Cedric Maurice, who is a member of the ROOTS executive committee, surprised himself with his outburst at the end of "Son of White Man." He was not

pleased because he had wished to maintain control, to respect the process. "My reaction was very spontaneous. I've never been overtly slapped in the face with anything as overtly offensive as what I thought I was seeing."

Maurice had actually expressed how most of the audience, black and white, felt about the end of Haggard's piece. Some 75 people stayed after the performance to discuss it. They seemed ready to shout invective, but everyone followed the process. "There was a lot of positive feedback," said actor Christine Murdock. "It must have gone on 15 to 20 minutes." Cedric Maurice even contributed.

Haggard asked several questions, including ones about the nudity (which wasn't seen as a problem, probably because a chair had been strategically placed in front of him). He didn't ask what had disturbed them at the end. There was no way to address this volatile issue in that stage of the process unless the artist brought it up.

In the third stage, when the audience asked questions, they found themselves stymied. "Nobody could get at it — that he was insulting," explained Murdock.

Finally Haggard asked, "Were you insulted?" This opened up the discussion.

Like Margaret Baker, who had performed the piece about Little Black Sambo, Haggard had believed that his work tackled racism, rather than reinforced it. He hadn't meant for the painting of his body and wishing for "more color" to contribute to racial stereotypes, positive or negative.

Even with the reasoned processing, the artist could sense the anger and anguish around him. "After we'd done the first step, and we were going into the second, he had to take a minute just to catch his breath, tears coming down his face," said Murdock. After the third step, Haggard departed, exhausted. Later he said he felt like "a couple of people acted like bullies. I think there's lots more to this story than simply Ed Haggard is a racist. It felt like these issues were being channeled through me. I'm a pretty loving kind of fellow. It should be clear I don't support any racism, classism, homophobia," he said. But he did appreciate the "tremen-

**"ROOTS is still a white organization. Whether it is going to be a viable place for people of color to come to" continues to be an issue.**

dous positive response" that he received during the first part of the process.

After Haggard left, almost everyone else stayed until 3:00 a.m. and continued talking about racism and Alternate ROOTS.

Kathie deNobriga, executive director of ROOTS, thought the process worked. "We were successful for the first time in applying our intellectual skills to an emotional response. We held a really principled discussion. There were some honest emotions that didn't stop the discussion."

"It was certainly passionate," Murdock said.

"I like the critical response process. It's supposed to be artist-driven. It feels safe," said storyteller Adora Dupree, who is a former member of Carpetbag Theater in Knoxville. "I get to say, 'I don't want to hear that now.' A lot of times people (audience members) want to dump their stuff on the artist." Dupree wants to know how her work comes across, but it's not always easy for an artist to hear criticism. With the process, she knows she won't be verbally abused. "I want to know that I've communicated. I want to know what the work evokes."

### Racism and White Liberals

While ROOTers generally like the critical response process, they can't use it to set the organization's agenda or structure. Like many progressive organizations with diverse memberships, ROOTS wants to be inclusive and democratic. In order to build a model that will show the way, however, they must first address fundamental assumptions about race,

class, culture, sex, and sexuality.

ROOTS sees racism as its defining issue — though black members and white members have differing visions of it. It seems that it's many of the white ROOTers struggle and obsession. They wish not to be simply a white liberal organization, and more than one call themselves "recovering racists," though they've been liberals for most or all of their lives. Their experiences in ROOTS have made them realize that they've missed something, and they're trying to figure it out. The blacks in ROOTS have dealt with this white liberal guilt with varying degrees of patience over the years.

Cedric Maurice, who lashed out at "Son of White Man," saw the issues clearly last summer: "When Ed presented that work, he peeled the scab off of the wound that has existed over Alternate ROOTS over all of these years. Some piece comes up that causes everybody to get into this psychological gnashing of the teeth. The agenda winds up getting put aside, or people feel put off because their concerns aren't being addressed. A lot of people wind up walking away with some misgivings, and a lot of people don't come back."

For some of the blacks in the organization (and for some blacks no longer in ROOTS), it's inadequate that some of the white members understand some of their racism. Awareness, interest, and guilt do not represent a paradigm shift. Even when blacks have assumed leadership in ROOTS, they have encountered an institutional structure that resembled a less socially conscious world. After four years as chair of the board in the mid-1980s, New Orleans storyteller John O'Neal (who is also a contributing editor to *Southern Exposure*), felt that his political needs were not going to be met by ROOTS. "The organization seems obliged to serve members who are overwhelmingly white middle class. I don't see how they're really effective at providing leadership because of the nature and the legacy of racism in the South. The political vision they seem to be driven by would be satisfied by just reducing the evidence of antagonism and not necessarily helping people confront and solve

problems."

His current group, Junebug Productions, still maintains membership in ROOTS but has "addressed a lot less energy" to the organization.

There is no theater organization for people of color, so ROOTS does fulfill a role unavailable elsewhere, pointed out Durham arts organizer and *Southern Exposure* contributing editor Nayo Watkins, a black woman. Even when blacks have served on the executive committee and as chair, "It hasn't transformed it into a people of color organization nor has it transformed the perception of equity. ROOTS is still a white organization. Whether it is going to be a viable place for people of color to come to" continues to be an issue, said Watkins. "Blacks in the group don't really set the agenda," she said.

Watkins does see progress. "I would evaluate it from how far it's come." But she finds the confrontations and the intensity at the meetings almost too much. "The meetings are wild. The atmosphere (at the camp) is so beautiful, and you can have great fun, but, you know, those damn issues come up. Just how much more of that stuff can ROOTS take? It really needs to find ways to allow people to say what they have to say and get on."

"Something's going on that needs to be looked at, at least if Alternate ROOTS wants to have black people in it," said Maurice. "I thought Alternate ROOTS was about supporting artists that are about social change, and now all of a sudden people seem to be of the impression that Alternate ROOTS' job is to combat racism, which seems to me to be another whole organization altogether."

### Message, Medium, and Money

But Maurice has strong feelings about what work from ROOTS should convey. A member of the executive committee, he wants something in the mission statement to ensure that someone with a message of hate would be barred. "We're not going to sit here with our thumbs up our butts and let them present."

This was part of the discussion at a ROOTS executive committee meeting in November. When the policy was "Who comes, is," there could be no question.

There's a piece that's offensive to my mother. Does that make me a motherist?

Though members told how their work contributed to social and economic justice, nothing said they had to show it. Could there be a method of review so that a work such as "Son of White Man" would not be identified as a product of a ROOTS member?

Adora Dupree worries that her own work would no longer find a home under a review. "How do we as an organization decide a work is racist and doesn't represent ROOTS? I'm really hesitant to go into an era of mission police. If my work comes under that kind of scrutiny, I won't pass. In my new piece ["Future Traditions," about her life and relationships] I look at genital mutilation. In cultures where it is a sacred ritual, I would be offensive. Does that make me ineligible to be a member of ROOTS? There's a piece that's offensive to my mother. Does that make me a motherist? The only reason we have Alternate ROOTS is because our work offended somebody, because it wasn't acceptable in a commercial genre."

The editor of *High Performance*, which covers innovative theater around the country, worries about the change of focus. "They're losing track of a shared mission," said Steve Durland. "If, as a group of artists, they get together and shove the art agenda aside to address racism, then what do people have in common? The primary focus still has to be on the art."

Lately, though, the primary struggle has been survival. As a nonprofit arts organization, ROOTS is facing severe financial troubles. Government support is evaporating, and artists are scrambling for funding. Foundations and individuals who support nonprofits cannot easily pick up the slack when so many organizations are competing with each other for

what funding is available. Being strapped for cash seems to sharpen differences and antagonisms and makes people less tolerant.

In spite of harrowing times, the staff is shaking itself up. They believe that if they wish to be a truly progressive organization, they must operate the way they'd like to see the rest of the world operate. This year, the three employees — one black and two white — restructured to bring more democracy to what had been a hierarchy. It may make a difference.

ROOTS has found a method to discuss their art at least. It is not a smooth process, and feelings still run high. But "Son of White Man" performer Ed Haggard plans to come to the annual meeting this year. He hasn't decided if and when he'll perform "Son of White Man" again. Cedric Maurice, the man who shouted at him, will be at the next meeting, too. In fact, the two men are talking about collaborating on a project.

S  
E

*Pat Arnow, editor of Southern Exposure wrote a play with Christine Murdock and Steve Giles, Cancell'd Destiny, that was featured at a ROOTS festival in 1990.*

### Alternate ROOTS

Little Five Points Community Center  
1083 Austin Avenue, Atlanta, GA 30307.  
404-577-1079

---

*Southern Exposure* published a special issue on theater in the South, "Changing Scenes," in 1986. It features many of the theaters mentioned in this article and is available for \$5 from the Institute for Southern Studies, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.

---

*High Performance* published an issue on Alternate ROOTS that includes details of the critical response process. It is available for \$6 from *High Performance*, P.O. Box 68, Saxapahaw, NC 27340.

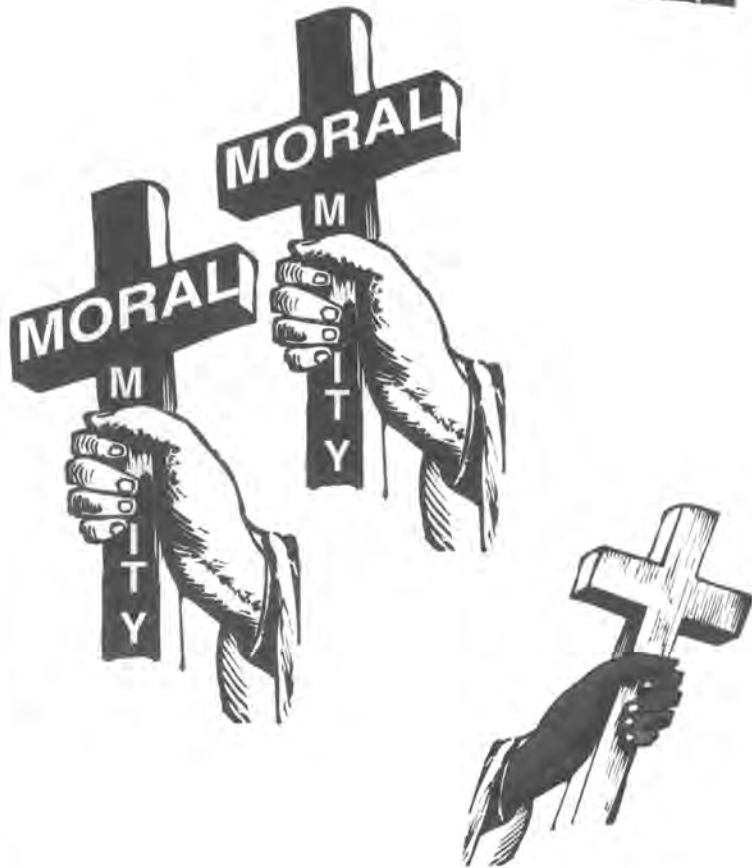
---

# All God's Children?

Though the Christian right's moral positions appeal to many African Americans, few blacks have answered the call.

By Ron Nixon

Reverend Gerald Smauldon didn't like what he saw around him. In his opinion the nation was headed on a "morally destructive course." Yet his fellow ministers were doing nothing to address this decline. "I had become greatly burdened over what I perceived to be a lack of concern on the part of many fine black church leaders," says Smauldon, an associate minister with the Family Worship Center of the Church of God in Christ in Columbia, South Carolina. "Though my initial instinct was to criticize my fellow black Christian leaders for their silence, God in the gentleness of His Holy Spirit



instructed me otherwise."

So instead of criticizing, Smauldon formed an organization called the Black Christian Coalition. The coalition, according to its founder, is a multi-racial prayer, education-based, social outreach program. The coalition also conducts abortion counseling and education seminars to "expose the racism associated with abortion," surveys candidates for political office on their views, and has a Government Policy Department that examines government policies affecting church and society.

"It is my earnest desire that black Christians, as well as Christians of other races, through the Black Christian Coalition will be drawn together as one to do the complete work of God here on earth," Smauldon says. "The primary focus of the organization is to engage in those projects that are beneficial to mankind."

Commendable goals. But not everyone

shares in Smauldon's vision. To many critics like Reverend Tim McDonald of the First Iconium Baptist Church of Atlanta, organizations such as the Black Christian Coalition are, more than anything else, an attempt on the part of the predominantly white religious right to attract minorities in support of its conservative ideals. "I don't think their agenda is spiritual in any form or fashion," says McDonald.

Smauldon dismisses these allegations. "[The Black Christian Coalition] is not a political organization, nor is it the secret arm of any church or para-church institution," he says.

There is no apparent connection between the Black Christian Coalition and the Christian right. Few people have even heard of the organization. But it is the kind of group through which the Christian right is making a concerted effort to reach minority groups. Over the

past year, members of the Christian right — particularly the 1.5 million member Christian Coalition which is perhaps the dominant force in today's Republican party — have helped elect politicians sympathetic to their beliefs. It has also begun meeting with leaders in the Catholic Church, rabbis, and black ministers. The group plans to send out voting guides to black churches and soon expects to run ads on black radio stations.

"We are about serious coalition building," says Brian Lopina, Director of Government Affairs for the Christian Coalition. "We welcome all people of faith that support the agenda of the Christian Coalition."

Adds Christian Coalition Executive Director Ralph Reed, "We have a vision. We are building a broad-based, inclusive organization: Catholic, black, brown. We're hot because we are on to something." That something, according to Reed, is a "true Rainbow Coalition, one which unites Christians of all races under one banner to take back this country, one percent at a time, so we will see a country once again governed by Christians . . . and Christian values."

So far the results have been mixed. Outreach has resulted in the formation of a Catholic branch of the Christian Coalition, and Jews now make up 2 percent of the Christian Coalition's membership, according to Lopina. Overtures to the black community have been less successful. At Christian Coalition meetings it's hard to find blacks or other people of color. And the problem is not confined to the Christian Coalition. Although groups like Focus on the Family, an anti-abortion group, and Promise Keepers, an all-male religious organization, contend that they too are actively recruiting people of color, the results on the ground are hard to come by.

"Most African-Americans view the Christian Coalition as firmly in bed with the Republicans," says Clyde Wilcox, a professor of Government at Georgetown University and author of *God's Warriors*, a study of the religious right. "In doing nonpartisan, value-based things, the African-American community is a potential reservoir of support for the Christian right," Wilcox adds. "But once

groups like the Christian Coalition mention issues like support for a flat tax or endorsing Phil Gramm for president, it doesn't sell well with the African-American community."

Wilcox says that support for the religious right among people of color also drops the more they know about its overall agenda. He gives school vouchers as an example, a program supported by the religious right and a number of blacks. They see vouchers as a way to give parents a choice of private schools and more control over their children's education. But when blacks realize that under the voucher plan, private schools can keep records and meetings private and that it allows schools to withhold data on drop-

**When it comes to school prayer, opposition to homosexuality, pornography, and abortion, the religious right gains tremendous support from the black community.**

out rates, test scores, and racial and gender breakdown, support for the plan drops tremendously.

Yet when it comes to school prayer, opposition to homosexuality, pornography, and abortion, the religious right gains tremendous support from the black community. "The only way organizations like the Christian Coalition will get significant support from the black community is if they stick to moral and spiritual issues and stop being political," says Wilcox. It's not hard to understand the attraction of many African-Americans to the rhetoric of the religious right. Dr. C. Eric Lincoln, a professor of religion and culture (emeritus) at Duke University, suggests we take a look at black history and the role religion plays in the life of many African Americans.

"The black church and the black com-

munity is an Old Testament, Biblical church and community," says Lincoln. "The black experience is such that God is real. Teachings about morality and punishment for transgressions are real. This is the black interpretation of reality.

"So anyone preaching the gospel of the Old Testament will find a responsive congregation in the black community," Lincoln says.

The evolution of these beliefs, says researcher Deborah Toler, who is writing a book on black conservatives, can be found in the early teaching of the newly freed slaves. "Most of this schooling was carried out by white missionaries and abolitionists from the North," Toler says. "These white instructors were intent on imparting the Puritan work ethic and morality in black schools of the day." According to Toler, "moral sexual behavior" and "conventional family lives" resonated with newly freed slaves because of sexual exploitation and the denial of the right to family life under slavery."

In a recent Gallup poll, 30 percent of African-Americans considered themselves a part of the religious right. Blacks who were Protestant were more likely to consider themselves part of the religious right. But only 17 percent of whites surveyed in the poll considered themselves part of the right.

In another poll conducted by *The Wall Street Journal* and NBC News, 87 percent of blacks agree that there is a need for stricter laws to curb pornography in books and films; 75 percent of whites take that view. And 53 percent of blacks agree that a moral decline is a major reason people are on welfare, while 58 percent of whites feel that way.

But even though polls indicate that many blacks consider themselves part of the Christian right, the term is not always equated with both political and religious conservatism as it is with much of the white Christian right. African Americans tend to vote more liberally than their white counterparts and are often less conservative on political issues. Yet with the level of conservatism in the black community on social issues in some cases higher than in the white community, the Christian right has had some success in

# The Lion and the Lamb

A few of the nation's most segregated institutions — the churches — are reaching out to each other.

By Mary Lee Kerr

In June 1995 the Southern Baptist Convention, an alliance of around 40,000 churches — mostly white — issued an apology for its history of supporting slavery. "For those inside the SBC, it's a step forward," says Ken Sehested of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, "but for many, it's too little, too late. There's no indication they plan to do much more than issue the statement."

And E. Edward Jones, president of the 4.5 million member National Baptist Convention of America, a network of African-American churches, asked whether the SBC, founded on the belief in the right to own slaves, issued the apology with a "hidden agenda" of attracting members rather than to set right 150 years of injustice.

Either way, the debate indicates that even the most traditional white churches in the South are starting to confront racism and other -isms within their ranks. While some efforts to deal with race in traditional white churches may be selfishly aimed at trying to increase numbers, revenue, and votes, there are pockets of people in mainstream churches who are looking for genuine ways of crossing lines of race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

"We want people to know that TV evangelists don't speak for all Christians," says Jim Rice, outreach director for *Sojourners* magazine. The faith-based progressive publication covers a range of justice issues and has published a study guide on white racism (see page 48). Rice says that if they really follow Christ's teachings, churches have a moral mandate to begin the important work of dismantling racism within the larger society — workplaces, schools, housing, and



Photo by Bob Matthews

**GARY FROST, SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION OFFICER AND PASTOR OF RISING STAR BAPTIST CHURCH, YOUNGSTON, OHIO, ACCEPTS APOLOGY "TO ALL AFRICAN-AMERICANS FOR CONDONING AND/OR PERPETUATING . . . RACISM."**

politics. That's the only way to achieve meaningful diversity in the church or anywhere else.

The Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America (BPFNA), based in Memphis, Tennessee, and boasting a large Southern membership, tries to do just that. "We try to end the isolation of Baptists concerned with justice by linking them to others," says Ken Sehested, BPFNA executive director and editor of the network's quarterly journal, *Baptist Peacemaker*.

For the past 11 years, BPFNA has connected 1,500 members in 32 regional groups doing grassroots church-community organizing. "Our vision is still to bring the lion and lamb together — red, yellow, black, and white — but we know it will be a lifelong process."

The BPFNA's history of facing issues like race, drugs, and domestic violence head-on has gotten the group into hot water. Even the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (a moderate offshoot of the SBC) cut off \$7,000 of BPFNA's funding when the group supported inclusion of people regardless of sexual orientation. "I now understand," says Sehested,

"how very fearful and disruptive it is to overcome a deeply rooted phobia."

Within all the mainstream majority-white denominations in the South, there are groups working to ease the fears and create inclusive religious communities. Some try to find ways for a diversity of people to worship under the same roof. Others preserve separate houses and styles of worship. Instead of striving for diverse memberships, they work in partnerships or coalitions toward a goal of separate leadership and worship but shared visions of a just society.

And while progressive people of faith are only a small voice in the wilderness of large conservative denominations, in some cases the voices are leading to some bigger actions — like the Baptist apology.

Here are some examples of the variety of work happening in the South's largest denominations:

† The United Methodists have intentionally worked toward diversity in their employment practices, hiring people of color and women at all levels of the denomination's administration. In coalition with other denominations, the Methodists have worked to become more open on the issue of sexual orientation through their Reconciling Congregations program, which is now focusing its educational efforts in the South. Six UM Reconciling Congregations are in the region now and more are in process.

† The Campaign for Human Development (CHD) uses money from special collections in Catholic churches to fund low-income, grassroots, self-help groups across the South and elsewhere, and to educate Catholics on justice issues. CHD Southeast field staffer Bonita Anderson

says you can't work on issues like race without also addressing basic economic needs of low-income people. For example, CURE (Collier United for Rights & Equality), a coalition of Catholic and other churches and local groups in Immokalee, Florida, works with Haitians and Hispanics to secure affordable housing and emergency medical help. CHD makes sure, says Anderson, that in CURE and the other groups they work with, needs addressed are determined by the grassroots constituents themselves.

† Originally an 800-member white congregation, the Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in Decatur, Georgia, now has 175 members — but half of them are black and half are white. "For white folks it meant acknowledging how much we had invested in the system of race," writes white Oakhurst minister Nibs Stroupe and African-American church elder Inez Fleming in a book on their experiences together in the church. "For black folk, acknowledging these steps (of whites toward change) meant a tremendous step of faith."

† In the Raleigh-Durham area of North Carolina, at least a dozen African-American and white churches have developed partnerships to work on community issues and celebrate together. Beyond these ongoing partnerships, three Raleigh churches have organized an interdenominational conference for September 1996 to explore racial reconciliation. The group has invited civil rights leader Rev. John Perkins to lead the gathering.

The kinds of justice and diversity issues these groups are pushing into the consciousness of their churches are hard to swallow for some, but for others such issues anchor their faith. As James Preston of the United Methodist Reconciling Congregations asks, "Are we going to be welcoming for all people? That's what the Church is all about. If we start drawing lines, where are we going to stop?"

Mary Lee Kerr is a freelance writer for Southern Exposure.

targeting blacks in the South on specific aspects of its agenda:

† In Louisville, Kentucky, black churches were recruited in an anti-gay rights battle when the Board of Alderman voted down a bill protecting gays from discrimination in 1992. Anti-gay organizers used a video, *Gay Rights/Special Rights*, which featured portions of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech interspersed with images of gay people kissing. The film had been distributed to black churches across the country to build resentment toward gays and lesbians. Said one of the anti-gay organizers in Louisville, "Black churches were extremely important to our winning effort. Blacks were offended by the idea of extending civil rights protection to a form of sexual behavior."

† In Durham, North Carolina, a black woman, Victoria Peterson, publishes the conservative newspaper *New Voice/New Generation*. Peterson is a staunch anti-abortionist and consistently writes fiery editorials promoting much of the conservative Christian right agenda — school vouchers, an end to abortions, and welfare reform. The paper also features a regular column from the conservative John Locke Foundation. The Raleigh, North Carolina, foundation is one of the leading conservative think tanks in the country. Though not a formal member of the Christian Coalition, Peterson says she supports most of the organization's positions. "Most African Americans in the Christian right are comfortable because we are amongst our Christian brothers and sisters even if they are white," Peterson says.

† In Jackson, Mississippi, the Christian Coalition supported Bishop Knox, an African-American principal from Wingfield High School who was fired from his position after allowing students to pray. More than 4,000 people from the black community and Christian Coalition turned out on the state capital in protest.

† In Georgia the Christian Coalition recently named its first African-American board member. And last July, 125 black ministers associated with the coalition met in Dallas, Texas. "We are seeing a dramatic increase in the number of Afri-

can Americans who are willing to better represent the moral conscience of our community by organizing with the Coalition," says Stephan Brown, who is in charge of outreach to communities of color for the Christian Coalition.

On a broader level, the Christian right has had a hard time recruiting African Americans in meaningful numbers. Only two high-profile supporters of the religious right are African American. Alan Keyes is a Republican candidate for the presidency and has been a darling of Christian Coalition leaders, and Kay Coles James is Virginia's former Secretary of Health and Human Resources. Before that, she was vice president of the

**"Personally, I would not practice racism, and I think my record proves that. But I would die for the right of other religious groups to do so for religious reasons."**

Family Research Council, a conservative anti-abortion advocacy group affiliated with Focus on the Family, headed by James Dobson. (Dobson distributes *Gay Rights/Special Rights*, the video that helps keep the gay and black communities divided.) Both Keyes and James are former government appointees under Republican administrations — hardly the kinds of African Americans likely to attract less-conservative blacks to the ranks of the religious right. This shows in the limited success of recruitment efforts.

Many African Americans have not forgotten that some of the leaders of the Christian right have often opposed efforts that would benefit their communities. Minister Jerry Falwell, who led the now-defunct Moral Majority, was an outspoken opponent of integration in the

1960s. More recently, the minister supported the apartheid regime in South Africa and called Bishop Desmond Tutu "a phony."

In 1982, Falwell also attacked efforts by the federal government to remove the tax exemption status of private schools that discriminate against African Americans. Falwell condemned the decision, stating, "Personally, I would not practice racism, and I think my record proves that. But I would die for the right of other religious groups to do so for religious reasons." Yet Falwell has sought to gain black support for his anti-gay crusade. He has begun mailing out appeals to blacks saying, "a person is a moral pervert by choice and should not be rewarded as a minority."

Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition, has also been an opponent of many policies that would benefit blacks. Although his 700 Club and other organizations within the Christian Broadcast Network employ many African Americans and Robertson counts ex-football great Rosie Grier as one of his friends, the televangelist has been a vocal opponent of civil rights laws. In 1988, Robertson applauded Ronald Reagan's veto of the civil rights bill, saying that the bill would have "expanded the power of the federal government in a radical way to control private institutions including religious institutions."

More recently, Ralph Reed, speaking at a dinner for the Detroit Economic Club, boasted that the Christian Coalition spent \$1 million to lobby in support of the Republican's Contract with America. Support for the Contract can hardly be seen as a way to reach out to blacks since most of the proposed cuts and reduction in services outlined in the Contract will fall disproportionately on African Americans.

"These people remind me of people who have in the past used religion to justify slavery," says Reverend Tim McDonald of the First Iconium Baptist Church in Atlanta. "They have another agenda which has nothing to do with

God. At the core it's [the religious right] segregationist and racist."

But the conservative *New Voice/New Generation* editor Victoria Peterson calls McDonald and other critics' statements "scare tactics. I've heard the same arguments about black men,

that they are all rapists and thieves, and we know that's not true," she says. "The Christian Coalition [and other religious right groups] are not racist. They are concerned about the moral welfare of this country as are a lot of African-Americans."

The religious right has much to gain by recruiting African Americans. A strong coalition of minorities within the religious right would be detrimental to the

base of the Democratic Party and a boon for the conservatives in the Republican Party. And there is a window of opportunity for the Christian right because Democrats have basically conceded the issues of moral, family, and spiritual values to the Republicans and the religious right. It's a move that could prove dangerous, according to Ronald Walters of the Center for Constitutional Rights in Washington, D.C. "If the religious right and the Republicans could take 15 percent of the African-American vote, they could be in power for some time to come," says Walters. Black politicians and the Democratic Party have "to understand the core conservative values in our communities and not overlook them."

That task won't be easy, says Reverend McDonald, because "blacks don't like to be put in a posture of fighting each other over social issues like homosexuality. Most black ministers are not going to come out and defend a controversial issue like this," he says.

But even McDonald admits that the Christian right's efforts are beginning to

show some effect on the black community. "It's not that they are going to get a lot of support from the black community," he says. "But when you start with nothing and end up with a little



**The Christian Coalition spent \$1 million to lobby in support of the Republican's Contract with America. Support for the Contract can hardly be seen as a way to reach out to blacks since most of the proposed cuts and reduction in services outlined in the Contract will fall disproportionately on African Americans.**

something it's better than what you had."

Brian Lopina of the Christian Coalition admits as much. "The Christian Coalition's agenda is one big agenda," he says, "not one political and one spiritual. But we are glad to have any support we can get on our agenda. Every little bit helps."

How this help will play out in the 1996 election and beyond remains to be seen. But one thing is certain — the religious right has established itself as a major player in the political arena and has set its sights on gaining a share of the minority vote. Whether this effort will bear fruit is not yet clear. Speaking to a group of supporters recently, Reed declared, "We are no longer going to concede the minority vote to the political left."

§

Ron Nixon is associate editor of *Southern Exposure*.





# Profiles in Cooperation

Some Southern organizations find ways to get together, help themselves, and shake up the system.

**By Janet Hearne**

In a recent interview, Steve Rebmann, secretary of the Tennessee chapter of the Christian Coalition, said, "Being pro-life seems to be a common denominator for conservatives."

Progressive grassroots organizations would be hard-pressed to name one issue around which they all can rally. Social justice may be a common goal, but it is not an inherently unified struggle. Groups may not immediately recognize that they have much in common. But many groups now recognize that to achieve real power, they must work with groups who might not look or speak the way they do or even share all of the same values.

The organizations profiled here found that the process of working with each other for change is hard, frustrating, and often slow to show results. But they have also found that the effectiveness of combined efforts is the reward for painful self-examination.



LAKE CITY, TENNESSEE AND JACKSON, TENNESSEE

## Save our Cumberland Mountains and JONAH

East Meets West and Startles Legislature

When Save Our Cumberland Mountains (SOCM) was founded 23 years ago to address issues of concern to the five east Tennessee counties (Anderson, Morgan, Scott, Campbell, and Claiborne), its founders did not intentionally create an all-white organization. But the people living in those counties were predominantly white, and membership reflected the demographics of the area.

Six years ago, that began to change. SOCM (pronounced sock-'em) is a member of the Southern Empowerment Project, a coalition which brings together grassroots organizations in Tennessee, Kentucky, and North Carolina for training. At a conference in 1989, SOCM representatives met the members of JONAH, an all-black organization based in west Tennessee. JONAH, founded in 1977, and named after the Biblical character, works on issues similar to SOCM's: tax reform, health care, workers' rights,

and the environment. In SOCM's case, environmental issues include the fight against strip mining and toxic runoff from coal mining operations.

Members of SOCM and JONAH met at the end of the conference and realized the two were really sister groups. "We were so stimulated by JONAH members and their work with the Southern Empowerment Project, we decided that we really should come together," says Connie White, past president of SOCM. "We invited JONAH to a leadership retreat in the fall of 1990. We thought we had a lot to teach and learn from each other."

At one of their early meetings, SOCM and JONAH members set out a map of Tennessee and colored JONAH's western counties green and SOCM's eastern counties blue. Looking at the green and blue map, the two groups realized how their combined efforts would increase the power of both groups. They asked themselves what it would be like if the

two organizations could work together on issues that concerned both groups.

One of those issues was abuse of temporary workers. In 1991, JONAH and SOCM held joint lobbying days at the state capital in Nashville. Connie White says they shared a "zillion" conference calls trying to decide which legislators should be targeted and what pressure they could bring to bear on the issue.

Howard White, a JONAH board member, says, "When we went to Nashville together, we scared a lot of politicians when they saw the white faces and the black faces banding together."

Unfortunately, Connie White admits, the time was not right for championing the rights of temporary workers. "With those joint lobbying days, we did not accomplish much of anything, but it was a good experience for both organizations. It gave us just a hint of what it might be like if we had a really strong coalition where there were members of both organizations in east and west Tennessee that could begin to sway some votes."

The next issue the two groups tackled was tax reform. Sales taxes bring in most of the state's revenues, which means that lower-income people, who spend a larger proportion of their income on taxed goods, bear a disproportionate share of the state tax burden. Tax reform threatens Tennessee's wealthy because proposed packages call for a reduction in sales tax and the institution of Tennessee's first state income tax. JONAH's challenge and influence forced SOCM to take a stand on the issue.

"Tax reform in Tennessee — it's a very divisive issue," Connie White says. "Some people in our organization were really afraid to take a stand, but JONAH pushed us on this. 'Are you going to do it or not?' they said. JONAH was absolutely right on." Because of JONAH, SOCM did take an organizational position in support of tax reform that would include some sort of income tax. The groups are continuing to push for reform.

In addition to working on issues,

"...we scared a lot of politicians when they saw the white faces and the black faces banding together."



**AT A LEADERSHIP RETREAT SOCM AND JONAH LEADERS CONFER ABOUT WAYS ORGANIZATIONS CAN BECOME MORE RACIALLY DIVERSE.**

SOCM and JONAH members, who meet every six months, have taken part in a "Dismantling Racism" workshop conducted by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond of Louisiana.

"I think one thing that we learned is the way to dispel myths is to have real relationships," Connie White says. "SOCM, as a primarily white, primarily rural, primarily working-class organization of east Tennesseans, struggles with the same kinds of stereotypes and misconceptions that other people do. It was really important for us to have formed the relationship with JONAH. I don't think we could have sat in a room and intellectualized our way out of racial stereotypes."

Howard White of JONAH agrees that racial understanding is one of the best things to come out of the cooperative venture. "A lot of SOCM members live where there are very few — to none —

African-American people. They had ideas about black people. When they get to meet you, work with you for a few days, all that changes. They've found out that some of these stereotypes aren't true."

Another positive result of cooperation is the move toward diversification of both organizations' memberships. Howard White has just been named as SOCM's first black board member and JONAH is trying to find new ways to attract whites to the organization.

Not long ago, JONAH members accompanied SOCM on a door-knocking campaign in an African-American community in Clymersville in east Tennessee's Roane County.

"The experience of having JONAH come with us and show us good approaches, that went really well," Connie White says. "But we did not organize successfully in that African-American community. What we've learned is we shouldn't assume that people in an African-American community will flock to an issue that we've identified is important to us. If we'd done it right, we would have done organizing in the community and asked

them what they were concerned about. Our mistakes were not due to JONAH but to our own lack of experience."

Despite the lack of headway during the joint lobbying days on temporary workers' rights and the poor response in Clymersville, SOCM and JONAH are optimistic about the future of their relationship. Both organizations see it is in their self-interest to work together across racial boundaries. In each of its training sessions, SOCM now works to help members appreciate diversity.

"When you listen to what people say and walk along with people as they work through past experiences and give them opportunities like the Dismantling Racism workshop," Connie White says, "we can do some amazing things."



# The Women's Project

## Spending Privilege — or — Putting Your Ass at Risk

**F**ounded in 1981, the Women's Project organizes community education and political action to confront violence against women, children, and people of color, women's economic issues and social justice concerns. These include sexism, racism, homophobia, ageism, ableism, classism, and anti-Semitism. While this may seem like an impossible range of issues for one organization to tackle, the project's founder Suzanne Pharr believes that the issues are intertwined. With this awareness, the Women's Project has achieved considerable success.

According to Pharr, the Women's Watchcare Network which monitors and responds to incidents of racial, religious, sexual and anti-gay violence illustrates best the way the project unites groups in a common cause.

"We bring together people who have experienced religious violence, like Jews and Catholics in the South, people who have experienced sexual violence, like lesbians, and people of color who have experienced racial violence. We have them tell their stories, and out of that people understand their commonality."

The project also works in the Arkansas state prison for women, training prisoners to do AIDS education with fellow inmates, sponsoring an ongoing support group for battered women in prison, and coordinating a program to transport children to visit their mothers on weekends.

The prison visitation program is made possible through the work of United Methodist Church women throughout the state who provide the transportation. These volunteers are, for the most part, white and middle class.

According to Pharr, the idea of what she calls "spending privilege" is the underlying philosophy of the Women's Project. "If you belong to a group that has historically been dominant and has been

the proponent of injustice, you have to do a lot to demonstrate that you're willing to put your reputation, your character, your life at risk on behalf of those who have been the recipient of that injustice. You



**WOMEN'S PROJECT OF LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS, STAFF AND BOARD MEMBERS, LEFT TO RIGHT, FRONT ROW: JUANITA WESTON, JANET PERKINS. SECOND ROW: DEBOARAH EVANS-JOHNSTONE, JUDY MATSUOKA, FREDDIE NIXON, SUZANNE PHARR, ESTELLA MORRIS, FELICIA DAVIDSON. TOP ROW: LINDA COYLE, ONIE NORMAN, LYNN FROST, ANNETTE SHEAD, AMY EDGINGTON.**

have to be a traitor to your whiteness."

Pharr contrasts spending privilege with paternalism: "Paternalism is acting in a kind of caretaking way. Spending privilege is putting your ass at risk. When we go to Klan events we are in physical danger. When we take on issues that are volatile, we get threatening phone calls." Pharr has had her home broken into.

There is also the issue of heterosexual privilege. There is a common assumption among outsiders that everyone who works for the project is homosexual because some of the work focuses on gay and lesbian issues. Lynn Frost, a Women's Project staff member (project staff do not have titles) explains that the heterosexual women on the staff have never been afraid to have the public sup-

pose that they are homosexual.

"I think African-American women on our staff and board who go to press conferences in support of gay and lesbian issues put themselves at risk of losing all their heterosexual privilege in their communities," Pharr says. "The risk is not physical, but it hurts like hell."

The social justice work encompasses the Women's Project staff who believe it is necessary to "walk the talk." Frost explains that the project tries to maintain a staff that is half women of color and half white. More than half of the board members are women of color.

Everyone who works for the Women's Project is paid the same, from the founder to the graphic artist who is hired on a contract basis to the people who clean the building. At the Women's Project, every woman's time is of equal value. All of the full-time staff are given equal access to decision making, and no one is spared the tedious jobs like putting on labels.

Although the Women's Project has been successful in uniting people across sexual preference, race, and socio-economic disparities, Pharr is concerned about the future. She feels that we are living in a time in which the political right wields great power. "They have been very successful in working along the fault lines of racism, sexism, and homophobia," she says. "Scapegoating allows fascism to develop. It contributes to our failure to look at the true causes of our problems." The work of the Women's Project and other progressive grassroots organizations, she feels, will be hard and results a long time coming.

"Cornel West, a black theologian, expressed it for me when he said he could not feel optimism," Pharr says. "There was nothing in his recent experience — or long-term experience — that would indicate that things are going to get better. There are massive forces that are moving, but at the same time, he was a person of hope. Hope is where you leap over the events that you see and maintain courage and keep going."

# St. Thomas/Irish Channel Consortium

## Talking to Mama and Papa

The St. Thomas housing project in New Orleans is one of the poorest in the nation. St. Thomas has 1,500 housing units, but a third of them are boarded up. The residents, according to Barbara Major, chair of the St. Thomas/Irish Channel Consortium, are 99 percent black. Ironically, St. Thomas is located in a section of New Orleans which includes the lower Garden District, home to some of the wealthiest "old money" families in the city.

For years, St. Thomas has been a magnet for a wide variety of social service providers, but the residents and leaders of St. Thomas were never included in the decision-making process. Five years ago, St. Thomas residents, who have a long history of tenant-rights' organizing, said "enough." Agencies serving the community were told it was time to renegotiate their relationship with St. Thomas.

"Even though money and services had come into the community, things hadn't gotten better. They'd gotten worse," Major says. "The resident council of St. Thomas told these institutions, 'if you are unwilling to come to the table, we are willing to go to the funding agencies and ask funding to cease and desist.'"

The agencies came to the table — not only because they were threatened but because they, too, were frustrated. They wanted to help, but their best efforts were not producing results. From the ensuing meetings between the residents of St. Thomas and community service providers, the St. Thomas/Irish Channel Consortium (STIC) was formed.

The consortium crosses age, race, and economic barriers. Residents work side by side with members of the wealthy, predominantly white Trinity Episcopal Church and representatives from predominantly white service organizations. It is not a case of whites "doing" for

people of color, however. The consortium has made it clear that the people of St. Thomas will provide the leadership.

There is one prerequisite to joining the consortium. Each member must participate in an "Undoing Racism" workshop, which is conducted by the People's Institute in New Orleans. As Major describes it, the workshop is not only about how

**"Racism had to be understood in order for us to understand our community. We understood if you had half white and half black, there was already an imbalance because the African-American community had been left out of the loop."**

white people deal with blacks but also about how whites deal with whites and how black people deal with other black people. The workshop also helps blacks understand how racism is internalized.

"Racism had to be understood in order for us to understand our community," Major said. "We understood if you had half white and half black, there was already an imbalance because the African-American community had been left out of the loop. We had no institutions, no computers, and we didn't have staff."

The workshop is not about blame and guilt, Major says. "You've got to talk to

people — not in a way to tear them down or rip them apart — but to call them to some consciousness. It's a natural thing for whites to resist black leadership. It's part of the social process. It's not about white people being bad. We've only been able to stand together because we put racism out there and began to grapple with it."

Together white and black members attend board meetings, work, and socialize. And together they have produced some model achievements.

One is the Kujichakalia (Kuji) Center which means "self-determination" in Swahili. The center serves St. Thomas's young people. At the outset, the consortium decided the center would not become another large social service bureaucracy. Rather than creating new services for the center, the consortium contracted out to existing community institutions.

"That center came out of the community," Major says. "All we do is from the bottom up. We wanted a safe place where our kids can learn about themselves, where they can talk to their mamas. And not only their mamas but their fathers, too, because we emphasize the visibility

of men in our community. We're talking about parents that nobody talked to while they were growing up." One of the significant issues, says Major is, "They haven't learned the skills they need to communicate about sexuality issues.

"But it's not enough to have a Kuji Center. We have to infuse the principles of the center in our schools where our kids begin to act and react differently. We developed a solid Afrocentric curriculum for our own kids. Our goal is not to create just services but to transform institutions."

The center's holistic approach to ad-



ST. THOMAS RESIDENT COUNCIL AND SURVEY TEAM PARTICIPATE IN NO/AIDS WALK, 1994.

addressing teen pregnancy has been used as a national model. Early in the consortium's development, St. Thomas was approached by a local funder looking for a collaborative process to develop a teen pregnancy prevention program.

"We said we might be interested in applying but we said there had to be some different principles involved," Major explains. "We decided we would not apply to any foundation that sees teen pregnancy as our number-one problem — because it's not. Teen pregnancy is an offshoot of structural problems. We wanted to look at racism and leadership development." Once assured, STIC applied for and received the grant in 1990.

The consortium was also awarded a three-year, \$1 million grant by the Casey Foundation in 1992 to become one of seven sites in the country to take part in a new initiative called "Plain Talk." "The program addresses the needs of sexually active young people and how you create a healthy community," Major says. "You look at the problem holistically. HIV and AIDS are being transmitted earlier. Just

saying 'no' is not the only thing we must do for those saying 'yes'."

The idea of the consortium, Major says, is to create a sense of family in the midst of, as Major calls it, "the most family-insensitive culture ever known." She is speaking "of the family of man."

"We must develop the minds, souls, hearts, and bodies of the people that are part of the community," Major says. "It's a feeding for the community. We're not only gonna be all right, we're gonna go beyond that. Damn, we can *do* this."

§

*Janet Hearne is a free-lance writer in Johnson City, Tennessee. Her fiction appeared in the summer 1995 issue of Southern Exposure.*

**JONAH**  
416 E. Lafayette  
Casey Building, 1st Floor  
Jackson, TN 38301  
(901) 427-1630

**The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond**  
1444 N. Johnson  
New Orleans, LA 70116  
(504) 944-2354

**St. Thomas/Irish Channel Consortium**  
624 Louisiana Ave.  
New Orleans, LA 70115  
(504) 895-6678

**Save Our Cumberland Mountains**  
P.O. Box 479  
Lake City, TN 37769  
(615) 426-9455

**Southern Empowerment Project**  
343 Ellis Ave.  
Maryville, TN 37801  
(423) 984-6500

**The Women's Project**  
2224 Main St.  
Little Rock, AR 72206  
(501) 372-5113



# The Business of Anti-racism

Are anti-racist workshops and “diversity” training about sharing power or about increasing productivity?

By Gary Delgado

The training session takes place in a large meeting room at a local hotel. Before the event starts, white employees laugh nervously as they fill their coffee cups or steal out for a quick smoke. In this group of 40, a small clutch of three black employees stands in the back of the room talking quietly, while the single Latina and Asian employees take seats next to each other at the end of the second semi-circle of 10 seats.

Confident and smiling in stylish suits, two women, one black and one white, call the session to order. The day-long training in “Unlearning Racism” begins promptly at 9:10 a.m. Joan Doads, a white eligibility worker with the Depart-

ment of Social Services, is a participant in the training session. She does not consider herself a racist, although she is honest enough to admit that after years of front-line work in the welfare department, she does carry some stereotypes about women on welfare.

She is actually surprised by the training. One of the sessions allows her to compare her feeling of being excluded when she moved to the city from a small town in eastern Kentucky to the exclusion people of color feel all the time. The session is quite moving for her emotionally. She is also impressed with the delineation of the dimensions of “white privilege” and the brief exercise that explores the web of institutional relations which promote racism. While there are some exercises Joan thought were hokey, overall, she is impressed with the training and leaves it resolved to do what she can to “interrupt racism.”

The following week Doads is back at her job at the welfare department. Despite her resolve about interrupting racism, she can still only offer her black or Latina clients limited job access, even more limited training or educational opportunities, and few support services to do either. Her job reinforces the racial order.

Has Doads’ training done much to address racism? Variations of this scene are repeated every day all over the country. Training session participants are exposed to the history of racial (and in some cases, gender-based) discrimination, given tools to understand their personal relationship to the perpetuation of racism, and, at times, taught how to “interrupt racism.”

## The Race Relations Industry

Anti-racist, or the broader-scoped “diversity” training, has become big business. While this new demand for training may be motivated in part by a sincere interest in addressing issues of race and gender discrimination, the dominant motivation is to make the workplace continue to function smoothly despite its changing demographics, especially at the corporate level. Studies published in the late 1980s and early 1990s found that over half of the current U.S. workforce is composed of women and people of color, and projected that white males would make up less than 15 percent of those entering the workforce over the next decade.

Dozens of firms have sprung up to meet the new demand for “managing diversity,” while relatively stodgy middle-of-the-road organizational development firms have added a “diversity” track to their repertoire, charging corporations and large nonprofits from \$300 to as much as \$8,000 a day for a single trainer.

The training is heavily marketed, with vast differences between the community-based “anti-oppression” trainers and the more corporate “diversity managers.” “The issue of cultural diversity,” observes San Francisco State Social Work Professor Margo Okazawa-Ray, “has created a race relations industry wherein anyone with a modicum of interest, creativity, and academic credentials can conduct workshops ostensibly to improve race relations.”

But do these sessions actually improve race relations? Aside from the criticisms of dyed-in-the-wool racists who generally find the sessions an unnecessary an-

noyance, there are three major criticisms of the training sessions. The first is that they tend to reduce racism to individual attitudes and acts of discrimination. This obscures the fact that institutional racism, the system of racial inequity that exists in a wide range of institutions by the normal process of their operation, is not dependent on the intentions of individuals. The second is that the training sessions are essentially commodities, slick packages which appear to provide an instant cure for a complex social problem, masquerading as social justice activity. The third is that "diversity training" in particular has, as its major goal, neither power sharing nor an end to discrimination, but rather, according to Ray Friedman of the Harvard Business School, "the creation of a work atmosphere where productivity will be highest."

Can the same training sessions geared to produce the corporate goal of increased productivity also achieve the radically different objective of some nonprofits — to shift power relations within the institution, and ultimately within society itself? Probably not. However, much of the training material shares a common source, *White Awareness: A Handbook for Anti-Racism Training*, a 1978 model for prejudice reduction developed by former University Professor Judith Katz, and published by the University of Oklahoma Press.

Katz's work was adapted by many early trainers, some of whom changed the order of the sessions, believing that it was important to reach people at an emotional level earlier than Katz projected. Others, in particular the New Orleans-based People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, added strong historical components documenting the history of U.S. racism and an easily accessible "foot analysis" which, according to one participant, "gives people a real understanding of who's kicking you in the butt."

Current training models include a wide variety of training formats and styles. Some focus only on race, while others address all forms of oppression. Some focus on organizational direct action while others focus on interpersonal relations. Some of the training formats are directed at individuals with no orga-



C.T. VIVIAN



GUADALUPE GUAJARDO,  
"TOOLS FOR DIVERSITY"

## "You have to wedge defenses loose from people and help them to care."

nizational affiliation, while others are only geared to address organizational dynamics.

As with any other endeavor which attempts to address attitudes, the effectiveness of the training is as dependent on the receptivity of the individual or organization as it is on the skill of the trainer and appropriateness of the design. Therefore, while it is difficult to assess the general results of anti-racist training, it is possible to examine the effects of some specific efforts.

### Making the Personal Political

Stridently addressing the criticism that anti-racist training does not address institutional change, veteran civil rights activist C.T. Vivian, CEO of the Atlanta-based Basic Action Strategies and Information Center (BASIC), argues, "You've got to start with the personal. People are often so personally prejudiced, they don't really care about anybody's humanity, including their own. You have to force people to drop their defenses. You have to wedge them loose from them and help them to care. When people care, they become creative."

There is significant evidence that Vivian's efforts to "make the personal political" have borne fruit. Dr. Lawrence Clark, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs at North Carolina State University, points to concrete changes at the University which are direct results of

Vivian's work, "C.T. has conducted three to four seminars every year since 1975, reaching over 1,300 people."

Clark, who remembers meeting Vivian in 1963 when Vivian came to his hometown in Virginia as a civil rights worker, observed with a chuckle, "His tactics are confrontational, and once you get into the seminar, there's nowhere to hide. But prior to C.T.'s intervention, we had very few black students in the textile, agriculture, and forestry departments. As a direct result of his work, we've not only managed to significantly increase black enrollment in those departments, we've hired African-American outreach and retention coordinators for each unit and created pre-college science and mathematics programs starting in the middle schools." He added, "The seminars are not a panacea, but they were very helpful."

### Percolating and Slow Dripping

BASIC's initial audience was strategically chosen, starting with deans of the college and continuing with department heads and finally faculty and students. Getting the support of key decision makers is an important dimension of the work. "It's people in positions of power and authority that have the power to make change," says Sister Guadalupe Guajardo, an anti-oppression trainer with the Oregon-based group, "Tools for Diversity."

# Before you train

The Applied Research Center has developed the following list of criteria for assessing the approaches of trainers conducting anti-racist work. While our criteria for assessment do not ignore the subjective questions of how people feel about themselves and others, it places greater emphasis on the degree to which organizational activities move people towards the goal of racial equality:

1. Does the activity truly address the complexity of the racial spectrum? *Most of the exercises, examples, and modes of analysis used by current anti-racist groups only address the limited spectrum of black/white relations. Given the subtlety and complexity of U.S. society, this approach not only fails to address the relationships of other people of color to whites, it misses a major dimension of racial conflict by ignoring conflicts among people of color. In order for anti-racist work to be effective, it must include methodologies to address the power relationships between whites and people of color and among different groupings of people of color.*

2. Does the activity develop the capacity of people of color to address their own oppression, or does it simply emphasize the ability of whites to become *noblesse oblige* allies?

3. Does the approach include an action plan reflecting changes in behavior? "Where the feet go, the head will follow" is an old axiom in community organizing. This axiom is based on a theory of learning by doing and on the common sense notion that it is much easier for people to repeat behavioral changes if you've planned it and helped people through the first time.

4. Does the approach lead to direct policy changes? Changes in policy can reinforce or even mandate changes in behavior.

5. Is there an evaluation component which addresses both individual progress in prejudice reduction as well as progress in institutional reform?

6. In an organizational setting, are the activities appropriate to the organization's stage of development, the political context, and the level of interest of key institutional actors?

7. Are the activities of the approach connected to other parts of the anti-racist movement and to a more general social justice agenda? *In order for people to participate in sustained action, it is necessary to see their specific anti-racist activities connected both to other parts of the anti-racist movement, and to the larger movement for social justice which addresses issues of race, sex, class, sexual orientation, social ecology, and economic equity.*

8. Do the activities assist participants in developing an analysis of the way racism works and how it complements the other oppressive "isms" in society?

9. Does the approach of the training organization, in all of its activities, model relationships which do not reinforce the dominant "isms"?

10. Does the approach develop the capacity of organizations of people of color to effect change in the society?

Guajardo's experience includes addressing the prejudicial attitudes and actions of the Portland police, working with students and faculty to alleviate racial tensions on college campuses, and addressing issues of racial and gender discrimination within religious institutions. Aside from the importance of getting key leaders on board early, Guajardo points to another important factor in successfully addressing institutional change: "We develop a task force of people inside the organization to continue the work." Making organizational change is a combination of what we call the 'percolator and slow-drip' methods. Whether the training focuses on personal awareness or we conduct an organizational assessment of race/gender discrimination patterns, it tends to percolate or stir things up. However, in order to make the change, we often have to support the 'slow drip' to overcome the inevitable institutional barriers to change."

## Anti-Racism at the Community Level

Unlike larger institutional settings which tend to be highly structured and hierarchical, conducting anti-racist training sessions with community-based organizations can pose a different set of challenges and achieve different results. For example, Shirley Strong, manager of the Levi Strauss Foundation's Project Change, works with an explicitly anti-racist initiative. She has worked with prejudice reduction trainers from both the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond and the National Coalition Building Institute in the foundation's community-based programs. Strong observes, "The training gets people talking the same language and helps frame the work. People get to understand and accept the concept of white privilege and racial oppression on an emotional, experiential, and intellectual level."

She is also convinced that the training can provide a framework for action: "When the Klan proposed a march in

Valdosta, Georgia, it was community residents that had been through the training session that successfully mobilized community opposition. The Klan decided not to march. I think that's pretty significant."

Not all efforts to address issues of race at the community level have been completely successful. James Williams, an organizer with Grassroots Leadership, a regional organization based in North and South Carolina, observes, "Although we have made some progress in addressing issues of race, gender, and homophobia, we are still experimenting with the most effective type of intervention." Williams coordinates the Barriers and Bridges Project, a multi-state effort to address difficult issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation within organizations. He noted that some groups like the North Carolina chapter of NARAL (National Abortion Rights Action League) and the Self-Help Credit Union in Durham used the training to create more



leadership opportunities for African-American women. For some other organizations the training created internal problems.

"One problem," observed Williams, "was actually related to too much enthusiasm. Each group participating in the Barriers and Bridges project has a two-person bi-racial team to address issues of personal prejudice and institutional racism and to analyze the structure, culture, issue priorities, and power dynamics within their organization. Sometimes team members exposed to the training would recognize clear inequities in their organizations and would attempt to 'fix' them without first helping everybody else to see them. Obviously this caused tension."

Another level of the problem, he said, "is that when some groups are confronted with the contradictions of their own practice, they are really not prepared to change." The important assumption by organizers of the Barriers and Bridges project, that basic change in the arena of race relations must come at the community level and should be modeled by community organizations, is shared by the Southern Empowerment Project (SEP), a 10-year-old multiracial association of eight community groups based in Marysville, Tennessee. A fundamental part of SEP's mission is to solve community problems by challenging racism and social injustice.

The organization's approach to challenging racism has included a combination of anti-racism workshops, facilitated discussion of how racism affects the organizing approaches and agendas of member groups, and the development of SEP's own institutional initiatives to increase the number of, and support for, African-American leaders and organizers. There has been some backlash to SEP's focus on racism in its annual organizer training program, especially from some of the younger, white, college-educated interns who feel that the organization's training is too hard on whites.

But overall, in the words of SEP coordinator June Rostan, "the effort to get serious about racism has had positive results." Reflecting on an SEP training ses-



**REV. JAMES WILLIAMS CONDUCTS A BARRIERS AND BRIDGES PROGRAM FOR GRASSROOTS LEADERSHIP.**

sion that local leaders from her organization attended several years ago, Maureen O'Connell, veteran organizer and staff director of Save Our Cumberland Mountains (SOCM), an organization with a predominately white membership in east Tennessee, said "This was the first training of this type that leaders from SOCM had been to. It was very helpful that the structure was organizational and not just individual, so it addressed why it is in our self-interest for the organization to cross racial barriers and be involved in this work. The discussion gave me real insight in ways to talk about members' self-interest in addressing issues of race."

SEP also assisted SOCM to develop an ongoing relationship with JONAH, a west Tennessee organization with a predominately African-American membership. This multi-racial cross-organizational alliance includes joint leadership training and legislative advocacy (See "Profiles in Cooperation," page 39).

Like Williams, Rostan's assessment of SEP's progress is modest but hopeful. "We've changed some attitudes and we have an excellent opportunity to experi-

ment with and work on institutional change." Obviously, there are many factors to assess when considering the effectiveness of work in the arena of dismantling racism. Trainers and community activists interviewed on the topic all agreed that long-term evaluations of different approaches would be helpful in improving the work in the field. In the final analysis, the only real measure of success of anti-racist work is concrete changes in conditions for people of color in the United States.

**SE**

*Gary Delgado is the Director of the Applied Research Center in Oakland, California.*

**Applied Research Center**  
25 Embarcardo Cove  
Oakland, CA 94606  
(510) 534-1769

**Barriers and Bridges**  
Grassroot Leadership  
PO Box 36006  
Charlotte, NC 28236  
(704) 332-3090

**BASIC (Black Action Strategies & Information Center)**  
595 Parsons Street  
Atlanta, GA 30314  
(404) 688-5935

**Levi Strauss Foundation Project Change**  
1155 Battery St.  
San Francisco, CA 94111  
(415) 544-7420

**National Coalition Building Institute**  
1835 K Street NW, Suite 715  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
(202) 785-9400

**Technical Assistance for Community Services**  
1903 SE Ankeny  
Portland, OR 97214  
(503) 239-4001



# Resources

## Publications

Madeleine Adamson, Basil R. Browne, and Gary Delgado. **Anti-Racist Work: An Examination and Assessment of Organizational Activity.** Applied Research Center (ARC), 1992. \$10. Originally prepared as a pamphlet for Project Change of the Levi Strauss Foundation, the book studies the works of 10 organizations.

Joseph Barndt. **Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America.** Augsburg, 1991. \$15.99. Written for the Christian community as a guide to understanding and dismantling racism, this book can be adapted to anti-racism work in other kinds of organizations.

Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule. **Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind.** Basic Books, Inc., 1987. \$15. Though academic in tone, this volume is still readable, and most women will see themselves at various points in their lives.

Angela Y. Davis. **Women, Race & Class.** Vintage Books, 1983. \$10. This is a wonderfully informative book about the intersection of gender, race, and class. . . A "must read" for activists.

Ruth Frankenberg. **White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness.** University of Minnesota Press, 1993. \$16.95. This book may be expensive (for a paperback) and extremely academic, but it offers a very current and accurate explanation of how race affects white people. Although it's about white women, most of the principles apply to white men as well. It helps us understand why whites can be so blind to behaviors that can hurt and infuriate people of color.

bell hooks. **Ain't I a Woman: black women and feminism.** South End Press, 1981. \$12. For an African-

American feminist perspective, this is a valuable and widely recognized resource.

Judith H. Katz. **White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racism Training.** University of Oklahoma Press, 1978. \$14.95. This valued book has been the basis for many workshops on overcoming white racism.

Paul Kivel. **Uprooting Racism: How white people can work for racial justice.** New Society Publishers, 1996. \$15.95. A new book written for progressives, *Uprooting Racism* explains the interconnections between racism and other forms of oppression.

Thomas Kochman. **Black and White: Styles in Conflict.** University of Chicago Press, 1981. \$8.95. This book is a bit outdated but very helpful to the understanding of how cultural differences in communication styles can make it difficult for people of different races to understand one another clearly.

Dody S. Matthias. **Working For Life: Dismantling Racism.** Fairway Press, 1990. \$12. This book is designed for Christian churches as a curriculum for anti-racism training.

Suzanne Pharr. **Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism.** The Women's Project, 1989. \$9.99. This excellent book on homophobia makes the connections with other forms of oppression.

Libero Della Piana, editor. **RaceFile.** Subscriptions: individuals \$48, institutions \$180, back issues \$9 each. A bi-monthly magazine presenting critical assessment of reporting on racial issues in both the established and community press, *RaceFile* has led the way producing informed commentary on issues from affirmative action to the Internet and communities of color. It is the only source which combines original perspectives with

commentary on what is being said in the media — and on what is not being said.

Anne Wilson Schaeff. **Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System in a White Male Society.** Harper & Row, 1985. \$12 (paper), \$4.99 (mass market). This book is a very easy read that touches on many aspects of sexism.

Sojourners. **America's Original Sin: A Study Guide on White Racism.** 1992. \$12. A Christian-based perspective on anti-racism activism, the book contains a series of articles on different aspects of racism and how to combat it.

Deborah Tannen. **You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation,** and, **That's Not What I Meant! How Conversational Style Makes or Breaks Relationships.** Ballantine, 1990. \$5.99. These are very useful books on understanding typical differences in communication styles between men and women. Tanner is not political in her analysis.

## Videos

**The Color of Fear,** by Lee Mun Wah, Stir Fry Productions (fiscal sponsors: Oakland Men's Project and Todos Institute), 1994. \$225 (purchase), \$50 (rental). A powerful one-and-a-half hour video; this documents a group of men of different races spending a weekend in honest, open discussion about racism and its impact on their lives.

**True Colors,** ABC Prime Time Live, Journal Graphics. In this 20-minute segment of a weekly TV news-magazine show, a hidden camera follows two men who are similar except for the color of their skin as they try to find work, rent an apartment, buy a car, etc. \$7 (transcript).

Jennifer Moses

# Awake, Awake, and Fly Away



**O**n Friday morning, over breakfast, Sterling looked up from the newspaper he wasn't really reading and said, "I have to attend a conference this afternoon."

"Oh?" Charmaine said. Charmaine was his wife.

"In Baton Rouge," he said.

Then, blushing slightly, he giggled. He giggled the way a sheep bleats: *bha bha bha bha*.

Charmaine got up, went over to the counter, and poured herself a second cup of coffee. She glanced over at Sterling. The old fool. He was so transparent she was tempted to grab a bottle of Windex and shine him up. Instead she pressed her lips together and felt the inside of her squashed lips with her tongue.

"Supposed to be hot today," Sterling said. "Heard it's gonna be a corker." It was mid-September. The city was going limp, the trees taking on a sad, brownish-greenish veil.

Sterling got up, stretched, and fumbled around in his pockets for a little while. Then he went upstairs. A minute later, she could hear him thumping around, searching for something she knew he'd never find. He was always putting things down and losing them. In the past, Charmaine would go through the house after he left for work, and put everything in order: his glasses in their faux-leather glasses case on his dresser, his papers in a stack on his desk, his comb and hairbrush side-by-side on the bathroom cabinet. She couldn't stand the clutter. But something had changed, and now she couldn't care less. The entire house was filled with things that didn't belong anywhere, and she listened to her husband bumping into the furniture with something akin to glee. A more useless man would be hard to find.

She waited until after he was gone to survey the damage. It wasn't impressive. He'd left the notebook in which he'd been recording his latest ideas about macroeconomics and the law on the back of the toilet, his belt under one of the throw pillows on the love seat in the den, and one of his shoes — brown suede with crepe soles — seemed to be missing. The other was half hidden under the bed. In the dark, cluttered room that had once been their oldest child's bedroom but now served as Sterling's home office, she found a pile of wadded up Kleenex, an American Express receipt from a place called the DixieLand Courtyard, and the program notes for a concert by a modernist composer she'd never heard of.

She threw out the notebook — it was small and narrow-ruled with a shiny cover the color of mint — and left the rest of his junk where it was. Then she cleared a place for herself on the bed, sat down, and called her best friend, Mary Ann Lewis, to tell her that she was sure of it: Sterling was fooling around again.

"I can't believe it," she told her friend. "Except that I have to believe it because he's just so stupid, in that thudding, duh-uh way men have, for me not to believe it."

"Oh sugar," Mary Ann said.

"I just can't believe it," Charmaine said again. It was all she could think of to say, because even though she was a talkative and gregarious woman, she was used to dealing with intangibles, and Sterling had become too tangible for her to make sense of.

"Jesus H.," Mary Ann said. Mary Ann never cursed outright, but continued to use the swearing style that had been popular among girls of her set when she was an undergraduate at Newcomb.

"God only knows what these girls see in him," Charmaine said. It had been embarrassing enough last time. He'd chased every student he could get his hands on — everyone had known about it. "He's fatter than a hippopotamus, can't even get up the stairs without breaking into a sweat. You should see the man eat.



He stuffs his face. You'd think he was a starving man, the way he dives into his dinner."

Mary Ann said, "It must be the messiah thing that some girls get. You know, a crush. Didn't you ever have any crushes on your teachers?"

"Yeah," Charmaine said. "But not on some old geezer like Sterling."

"I see what you mean," Mary Ann admitted.

Even Charmaine didn't know why she wanted him anymore, other than for old times' sake. In certain circles of the law school where he taught, he was a laughingstock. The younger faculty members, those snide Yankees with specialties so rare that Charmaine couldn't get them straight in her head, called him "W.B." — for Windbag — behind his back. But hell, These days you had to be black or Puerto Rican or a lesbian or something to even get your foot in the door, she thought. You had to be a black lesbian post-Marxist eco-feminist. The world had gone topsy-turvy crazy or maybe she, like Sterling, was just behind the times — dinosaurs among fleet-footed fawn. She'd come down to this beautiful and hot Southern city 21 years ago to start a new life with him, to invest in his future, to be the kind of good wife to him that her own mother (now a crone, hidden away in a nursing home in Raleigh) had been to her father. And look where it got her. Her house was closing in on her. Her college-age son was doughy of face and mind, his greatest ambition to do well enough on the LSATs to get to a second-tier law school. Her teenage daughter, always moody, was now positively morose, given to writing maud-

lin poetry about blackbirds.

*Awake, awake, and fly away—  
on broken wing, cawing,  
cackling hideously into the night.*

(Or maybe they were poems about witches. Who knew?)

From somewhere in the depths of Mary Ann's house, Charmaine could hear the sounds of a vacuum cleaner. Mary Ann had divorced her first husband and married a man who'd made a fortune in real estate. Now she lived in an enormous balconied house in the Garden District, and her maid, a too-thin Cajun who never smiled, scrubbed the grout in the bathroom with a toothbrush.

Under her own feet, Charmaine noticed that the dhurrie rug — she'd bought it two years ago at a going-out-of-business sale — had a large, greenish stain on it.

"But are you sure?" Mary Ann said.

Charmaine looked at her free hand. No matter how often she poured lotion over them, her skin was dry, red around the knuckles, and shot through with pale blue veins.

"Sure I'm sure," Charmaine said. "He left a paper trail a mile long. Receipts, brochures. I wouldn't be surprised if he came home tonight with lipstick on his shirt collar."

"Maybe he *wants* to get caught," Mary Ann said.

"Christ knows."

"Or maybe he's making up the whole thing, trying to make you jealous."

"No," Charmaine said after a little while. "He doesn't have the imagination."



y the time her daughter, Cassandra, got home from school at four o'clock, Charmaine had gone to the grocery store and the dry cleaners, had her hair trimmed, and weeded her garden. She had had time to consider and then reject her options.

Option number one was to confront Sterling with proof of his infidelities and then threaten (as she had last time) to expose him to his children, his colleagues, and his mother, of whom he was afraid. But this no longer appealed to her, if only because it seemed old hat. True, last time it had worked, but last time also she had been hurt. Hurt and afraid — the betrayed wife, playing her role to the hilt. And then the mess that had followed — the trips to the marriage counselor, the shouting matches, the long, earnest late-night conversations that had to be whispered so as not to wake the children. Option number two was to track down the girl and threaten *her*. This was equally unattractive. For one thing, Charmaine was none too sure that she still had the vigor required to intimidate. Even 10 years ago she was a striking woman, with her thick reddish-blondish hair and white skin and blue eyes and big bosom. But

now she was fading into a certain comfortable, if still attractive, matronliness, and she wasn't sure she could summon forth the sense of outraged sensuality that, in the past, had served her so well. And there was another thing. She wasn't sure she really wanted to meet the poor stupid bovine-like creature (she pictured a sad-eyed girl with bad skin and a bottom dimpled with cellulite) who for whatever reason was sleeping with her husband. She knew she would just get depressed. Finally, option three was to tell Sterling that she knew about his little friend and that she'd decided as a result to seek a divorce. (In the state of Louisiana adultery was ample grounds, and she knew she'd get the house, the car, and custody, for what it was worth, of their teenage daughter.) This option was also out. For she didn't — and this was where she came up short — want to leave him.

She didn't want to be alone and couldn't picture life as a divorcée. She was afraid that the first time she slept with another man, she'd get AIDS. She was afraid that her insides would dry up. She was afraid that she'd become one of those awful women who join women's support groups and eventually stop coloring over their gray hair.

It hadn't been all that long ago that she'd turned heads. The amazing thing was how careless she'd been of her looks, not in terms of how she treated them (for she'd always treated them with respect, dressing herself with care and style, and taking care of her soft white skin), but rather, in their effect on men. Men had fallen all over themselves to catch her eye; before she was married, they'd practically lined up at the doorstep. Even after she was married, and for years and years, they found their way to her, to the kitchen in the back of the house, or to her small and pretty garden, to flirt and insinuate and charm and finally go away angry.

At any rate, once Cassandra was home, Charmaine was no longer able to dwell on her problems. Cassandra was 16 and red-headed like her mother. Unlike her mother, she was skinny and fierce, with no respect for subterfuge. She had three earrings in her left earlobe, and she outlined her lips with brown lip pencil. She was wearing an ankle-length flowered dress of the kind hippies used to wear, which had the odd effect of making her look like a small girl playing dress-up. Though she went to a Catholic school, she had no sense of propriety. In the early '80s the school had done away with teaching all but the most superficial sense of sin. A terrible time. Jimmy Carter in the White House and hemlines dropping faster than the price of oil.

Now Cassandra threw her books down on the love-seat (the same one where, earlier, Charmaine had found her husband's belt), turned around, and said, "I'm going to have an abortion."

Charmaine bent down to pick a piece of lint off the floor, then thought better of it.

"Aren't you going to say anything, Mother?" Cassandra said. There was a small hole in the seam of her dress a few inches from her armpit.

Charmaine collected herself. If this were a movie, she thought — but then dismissed the thought from her mind for being too trite. "What is it that you would like me to say?" she said.

"All right then," Cassandra said. Her skin flamed red, then went white again. She was a pretty girl. As pretty, in her own way, as Charmaine herself had been. But there was no refinement in her looks, no artistry to her movements. She was all reaction: a steaming stew of instinctual yearnings. In some ways, Charmaine preferred her dull dull son, Billy. At least he didn't make you perform every time you had to see him.

"In that case," Cassandra continued. "I'm not going to have an abortion!"

"In what case, dear?" Charmaine said. She had a headache coming on. The coffee table in front of the love seat was cluttered with Sterling's things — looseleaf note paper covered with his scrawl, ancient copies of obscure law reviews, paper clips, dried-out ball point pens.

"I mean," she said, "if you don't even *believe* me."

Charmaine stared at her.

"And I absolutely, no, I positively. I completely loathe and detest the hypocrisy of the so-called intellectual classes, to which, may I remind you, Mother dear, you and your husband have laid claim to?"

In addition to writing poetry about blackbirds, Cassandra had been reading Jane Austen. It was an odd combination, Charmaine thought — bad poetry, an even worse sense of personal style, and Jane Austen. Of course, she herself had gone through a Jane Austen stage — doesn't everyone? — but she'd always been able to keep a cool





head.

"Dear?" Charmaine said. But it was too late. Cassandra had hurled herself into her bedroom and locked the door.

She tried anyway. She knocked, and, hearing nothing, said, "Dear?"

"What if I were to tell you that I'm a lesbian?" Cassandra said in a voice thick with sobs. "What would you say then?"

What she should have said, she thought later, was: "If you're a lesbian, then I wouldn't think you'd have to worry about pregnancy, unless they're doing things these days that hadn't been invented in my day." How, exactly, did women make love to each other, anyway? With their hands? With their mouths? Or did they have to employ specially designed objects, the kind purchased from catalogues that used to be advertised on the bulletin boards of French Quarter bookstores? It was a subject that Charmaine had briefly been interested in. But she didn't say any of that, because she was just too stunned to make a rejoinder as she stood in the sunlit clutter outside her daughter's bedroom door.

The last thing she needed was a pregnant daughter. Of course if Cassandra really were pregnant, and Charmaine wasn't at all sure that she was, then steps would have to be taken. Counseling. An appointment with a doctor. And then the abortion itself, with all its attendant misery, its moral failings, its ordinary awfulness. Talk and then more talk — with Cassandra's future therapist, with her school counselor, with Cassandra herself, and yes, even with Sterling. God, just what Charmaine hated. Getting

down and dirty with various M.S.W.-wielding nitwits.

Instead she tapped gently on the door and said, "I'm here if you need me, Cassandra. I want to talk. Whatever it is, I want to help you." But she hated the sound of her own words. She hated how much she meant them.

When Sterling came home a little after 6:00, Cassandra was still locked in her bedroom, and it had begun to rain.

He walked into the kitchen, where Charmaine was sitting at her desk paying bills. He mopped his brow with a dish towel, and said, "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away."

"What, Sterling?" Charmaine said.

"We sure do need this rain," Sterling said. "Sure was a corker today. Thought my tires were going to melt."

"Uh huh," Charmaine said. She didn't know why he had to try so hard and be so bad at it.

"On the way to Baton Rouge," he said. "Highway packed, too, bumper to bumper, all the way from the airport to Gonzales almost."

"Uh huh," Charmaine said again.

"Interesting conference, though," Sterling said. "About the ultimate constitutionality of the so-called balanced budget movement."

"Uh huh," Charmaine said.

"Frank Simmons — you remember him, handlebar mustache, smart as a whip, over at L.S.U. — he was Chair."

Sterling sat down heavily at the kitchen table, then got back up, then went over to the sliding glass doors in the back of the house to watch the rain. "Where's the kid?" he finally said.

Charmaine shrugged. She hadn't planned what if anything she was going to tell Sterling today. As it was, Cassandra intimidated him. She didn't know what he'd make of a pregnant or maybe not-pregnant but still clearly disturbed daughter. "Look Sterling," she finally said.

He blushed, then giggled: *bha bha bha*. Lately he had grown his grayish-orangish hair long on top and combed it sideways across his bald spot.

She closed her eyes and shook her head. Look, Sterling, you fat old philandering windbag laughingstock jackass, you've got to stop this nonsense now. What is wrong with you, that you don't see the beauty that's right before your eyes?

"She's upstairs," Charmaine said. "In her bedroom. She said she's pregnant, but then she said she isn't. Then she told me that she was a lesbian. Then she locked herself in her room."

His relief was immediate and palpable. His skin returned to its regular hue of ripe peach, his breathing became less labored, and his gut, which he'd been sucking in as if he were preparing to take a blow, billowed out over the top of his unbelted trousers.

"Well," he finally said, "I suppose if she is pregnant, then she's going to have to have an abortion. Right? I mean. What I mean is, do you think she actually is pregnant? I mean, our little girl?"

"I don't know," Charmaine said.

The kitchen needed a complete overhaul. Because if she were, after all, going to leave her husband, she'd want to start anew, sell this dump, and move somewhere else, perhaps into one of those pretty brick houses on the other side of the lake. For one thing, the wallpaper was so old that it no longer hung straight but was rumpled here and there along its seams. The countertops and cabinet fronts were dark with use. There was a large water stain on the inside of the refrigerator in the shape of a Rorschach ink blot.

From upstairs she heard the sounds of slamming doors, then running footsteps, and then her daughter's angry voice crying "Double fuck."

"Don't run away from me, young lady," Sterling said a moment later. "Don't —" but Charmaine couldn't hear the rest of it. It wasn't like Sterling to go around making proclamations. His paternal style was *laissez faire*. He'd smile and joke, and, when the kids were little, he'd given them piggy-back rides. "Don't —" Charmaine heard again, which made her wonder if perhaps Cassandra knew, in some intuitive teenage way, that as a husband Sterling wasn't all that he should have been. But a moment later, when she heard something that sounded like something shattering — it could have been a vase or water glass or window or paper weight — she forgot what she was thinking and went upstairs to see what the trouble was.

Cassandra had hauled her mother's old suitcase from the top shelf of the linen closet and was hurriedly stuffing her things into it. There were marbles all over the floor, some still rolling. Charmaine or someone must have shoved them in the back of the closet years ago, perhaps when the children had outgrown them. They were the old-fashioned kind, blue and red glass, with swirls and sparkles inside, and they shone in the dust-speckled light.

"Look what she's doing, Charmaine, just look at her," Sterling said. He was sitting on the love seat, out of breath. "Do you mean to tell me that you're running away?" He turned back to his wife. "She's packing her things, Charmaine. Just look at her. She's packing her things."

"I can see that," Charmaine said.

"You want me to kill my baby," Cassandra said. "And I'm not going to do it. I'm not. I don't care. It's my body and my baby and I'm not killing it just because you want me to."

There was a scrap of paper on the floor underneath Charmaine's toe.

*Into the night —  
Take flight —  
Black.  
White.*

Sterling got up from the love seat. His face was red. "I'll be goddamned if I'm going to be made a grandfather at

my age. And maybe while we're on the subject, perhaps you can enlighten us as to the brave squire whose issue you're carrying?"

"Oh, why can't you just shut up?" Cassandra said. "You sound like some weirdo in a bad book."

"And listen to how she talks to her father," Sterling said.

"Charmaine, did you hear her?" He sat back down again.

It was strange. Cassandra's usual style was to ignore her father. And because he was afraid of his daughter, he was happy to let her ignore him. Charmaine looked to her husband, then to her daughter, then back again to her husband, and wondered what she should do. Clearly, she thought, this was a crisis. It had all the earmarks of one.

"Calm down, everyone," she said.

Cassandra began to wail.

"Are you, or are you not, pregnant?" Charmaine said.

She wailed even harder.

"I don't know," she finally said. Her shoulders, under her flowered ill-fitting dress, sagged, and a moment later she flopped face down on the bed.

"I see," Charmaine said. She waited a minute, then went into her daughter's bedroom and closed the door behind her.

"Are you trying to tell me that you're a lesbian, dear?"

Charmaine said.

"Oh God, Mom," Cassandra at last said. Her face looked stricken. It was long and pale and child-like, with big eyes.

"Why are you so stupid?"

"Am I stupid?" Charmaine said, but Cassandra didn't answer.

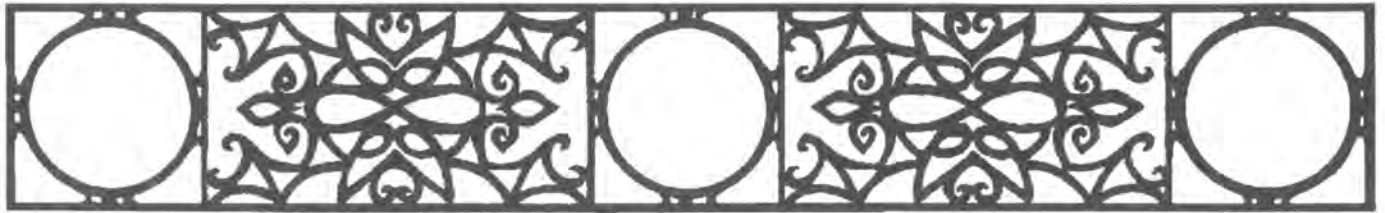


© 1996 M&M

At last she succeeded in calming her daughter, and though she still didn't understand what, if anything, had happened, she felt sure that Cassandra wouldn't bolt, at least not tonight. She made her lie down and breathe deeply, and then, when it looked like she was beginning to relax, Charmaine went downstairs

and made her some Campbell's tomato soup. She put half a Valium in it, then sat by the side of the bed while Cassandra, now wearing the oversized Minnie Mouse T-shirt that she slept in, drank one cup of soup and then a second, and then fell asleep. Outside it began to rain again and the sky went from blue to pink to purple, and Charmaine wondered what it was about this beautiful, hot city that made so many people go crazy.

Mary Ann called around 8:00 to check in, but Charmaine told her that she couldn't talk. Then the man from the dry cleaner's called to say that he didn't think he could get the stain out of the dhurrie rug that she'd dropped off that morning. Then Sterling emerged from his office and asked her what was for dinner. She stared at him. He had a pen stuck behind each ear, and his face was so fat he had jowls. He looked like a hippo. It



was hard for her to imagine that just a few hours earlier he'd been conjugating the verb with some weak-eyed and most assuredly neurotic co-ed. Only these days, of course, they didn't call themselves co-eds. There were as many girls as boys in the law school, and all of them looked alike: drab and asexual in jeans and white button-down shirts.

"I didn't make dinner," Charmaine said flatly.

Sterling opened his mouth to say something, then closed it, then opened it again. "What about her?" he said, indicating with a nod of his head the upstairs bedroom where Cassandra slept. But she didn't have an answer for him, because when she was Cassandra's age, she'd spent her days and nights dreaming of love, and though she'd been brave, she'd never been silly. She'd been beautiful and full of life and smart, and she'd known her worth, and held out. Mistakes, she'd known even then, were for other people. Her only other up-close experience with teenagers had been with her son, Billy, but Billy was as innocuous as Christmas. A good boy, who made good grades and dated good girls who, like Sterling, giggled often, Billy was sweet, earnest, and loyal as a collie.

"Do you think she is?" Sterling said.

"Is what?"

"Pregnant." He said it noncommittally, as if he were ordering a turkey on rye for lunch.

"I think it's more likely that she's scared," Charmaine said, closing her eyes. "I don't think even she knows what she's scared of. Herself. Her future. Girls at her age —" but then she stopped, because the truth was that she had no idea what girls at her age were like. She herself had never been the age Cassandra was now. She'd gone from being a child to being a woman, then a mother, and, then, without warning, a frump — unloved, misused, desexualized.

"Girls at her age have just gone completely out of their minds," Sterling continued for her. "It's something in the air, maybe. Or it's their hormones. Hormones jumping all this way and that. Jumping out of their skins. And that crap they watch on television, that V.T.V. or whatever it's called, those rock stars performing fellatio on their microphones."

Charmaine stared at him.

"And it's not enough that you try to raise 'em on the straight and narrow, give 'em love and some kind of education and try to instill in them a sense of decency, because sooner or later they're going to look around at the fellows on that video show having sex with their guitars and realize that the best you can do is grow up and marry some poor decent fellow and grow old together in a house, and maybe have a kid or two, maybe eat some good food, get a little drunk, and when it comes right down to it, that's not much, is it? I mean, compared to what you think your life should be." Sterling abruptly stopped and sat down.

"Why Sterling," Charmaine said, truly moved. "That was something. Really. That really was."

He looked at her, then down over his big stomach at his shoes, then back out the sliding glass doors, to the dark, steaming garden. "Why don't you love me anymore, Charmaine?" he said.

"What?" You hound dog. You snake. You pompous pontificating old fool.

"Because if only you loved me —" he said, but he didn't finish.

*Night.*

*White.*

*Soaring — beating wings — toward the light.*

*In the darkness of my*

*Vampire bite.*

Her husband was snoring beside her and her daughter was drugged and asleep in her childhood bed, but Charmaine was wide awake. She was wondering what she should do, wondering how she had come to this place in her life, wondering if it was too late to save her own soul.

SE

*Jennifer Moses' fiction has appeared in Commentary, Mademoiselle, The Gettysburg Review and other publications. She lives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and writes regularly for the Washington Post. All illustrations by Patricia Ford.*





# Ms. Antoinette's Version of The Rabbit and the Turtle

By Junebug Jabbo Jones

*There's this lady in the Treme section of New Orleans that has about twenty-seven or twenty-eight grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren living in the neighborhood. I don't know how many more they have living in other places. Ms. Antoinette Smith Lafontaine Gex McIntyre de Castro Johnson says she's already buried five husbands and don't need no more men in her life than she's got already.*

*Ms. Antoinette lives on one side of a Creole cottage on St. Claude Street. She officially lives by herself but she's always got somebody living there. If none of her kin people need the space, she'll give it to somebody from her church or some organization that she's working with or somebody. She doesn't believe in the modern conveniences like dish washers and washing machines so she's always cooking or cleaning or something and gets good use out of the big black kettle in her back yard. Not long ago I had the pleasure of sitting with a bunch of kids in Ms. Antoinette's backyard and heard her tell a version of The "Rabbit and the Turtle" that sticks in my mind. Maybe there's good reason to pass it on to you.*

**I**t was during the time when there was always a big ruckus in Africa where everybody lived. It was bad. Every time you'd step out of your house you was taking your life in your hands. It was so bad that bees were even stinging each other. Cats were jumping on dogs, and mice were just as quick to jump on cows

and try to eat them up as to wait on a piece of cheese come along.

It got so bad that people started dying out because they couldn't get to a place where they could eat or get the things they needed to build their houses or make their clothes or any of the things they needed just to get by. Some of the animals even started eating and drinking things that made them drunk or crazy so they would either forget about how bad things were or be able to work up the nerve to start a humbug with somebody in order to take advantage of them.

It was about the same time that human beings had figured out how to make bows and arrows strong enough that they could stand off way yonder and shoot the animals down before they so much as knew there was a hunter anywhere about. The situation got so bad that one day a yellow-tailed hummingbird tried to steal the sweetness out of Monk's last ripe banana and then tried to beat Monk all upside the head with his little tiny wings when Monk caught the yellow-tailed thief doing his dirty work.

That was too much! That was the last straw! When monkeys can't even be safe from hummingbirds, it's a serious situation.

The monkey swallowed his pride and went calling on the lion. Old Monk was not one of Lion's favorite people in the first place. The lion took every chance he

could get to get even with the monkey ever since the time "that devilish monkey" had tricked the lion into a fight with the elephant and more or less gotten away with it. So Monk was very careful not to go by Lion's house till he knew that Lion was weak from not eating right. Still Monk stayed up high enough in the tree so the lion could hear him talking but wouldn't be able to get at him in case the lion took a notion to make a meal out of

monkey meat. Monkey was also very careful not to tease or clown up on that branch, cause he remembered the terrible whipping that the lion had given him the time he was laughing at the lion because of the elephant fight and fell down to where the lion could get at him. It was not a pretty sight, I tell you, so Monk was real careful on this day because of his serious business.

"Hey Mr. Lion, things have gotten really bad around here. We need to talk."

"Monkey, I ain't had nothing to say to you since the time you lied to me about what the elephant said about my momma. The only thing I got to say to you is that the next time I catch you, it ain't going to be enough of you left to put in the ground."

"Aw, come on Brother Lion, you

*Cats were jumping  
on dogs, and mice  
were just as quick  
to jump on cows  
and try to eat them  
up as to wait on a  
piece of cheese  
come along.*



know a King of the Jungle ain't supposed to carry no grudges. Besides we got some serious problems to work out. While I was out swinging through the jungle the other day looking for something good to eat I had to go to the base of the mountain way yonder and I saw some of those two-legged arrow shooters working this way.

"Then this morning a yellow-tailed hummingbird went upside my head because I caught him trying to steal all the sweet out of my last banana! If we don't work out a way to help each other we'll soon be in some serious trouble on this end of the jungle."

"You've been in some serious trouble

for a long time, Monk. I get mad just thinking about you."

"You think we in trouble now, just wait till the hairless bow-and-arrow shooters get here."

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"I know you're the King and I played a little joke on you a little while back, and I'm sorry. I'm truly sorry. . . . What's the matter, King, can't you take a little joke?"

"You call that a little joke! That elephant hurt me so bad I was laid up for three weeks. My hip was broken in three places. I still walk with a limp on this side."

"I tell you what. After we get the ani-

mals to stop beating up on and killing each other, I'll go to work for you for a whole month for free. But if we don't take care of this fighting business soon, none of us will be left around here to do anything. We might even kill each other off before the no-haired arrow shooters get here."

"You, little monkey, might be in trouble. I'm told that the hairless, two-legged bow-and-arrow shooters love monkey meat almost as much as I do, but they run in fear when I raise my mighty roar."

"Now that they have those arrow shooters, they won't have to be afraid of your roar. They'll be able to shoot you

down before you're close enough for you to even smell them. I think we need to have a meeting to figure out what we can do before we all kill each other. You, Brother Lion, are the only one that everyone respects enough. If you called a meeting, everyone would come."

"Gr-r-r-r."

Ananse the Spider, who was able to change his size and shape was hanging around from his fresh new spun web listening to the argument between the lion and the monkey. "Hello, Oh Mighty King of all the Animals, you look particularly powerful today."

"What? Who dares disturb me while I stalk this worthless sack of monkey bones?"

"It's only me, your honor, Ananse the Spider, your humble servant. How are you today, Brother Monk?"

"I'm worried, Brother Ananse.

There's hardly any food to be found anywhere, the hairless, two-legged arrow shooters are closing in on us, all the animals on this end of the forest are fighting each other, and Brother Lion here won't help me call a meeting so we can work out a way to do something about this awful situation—just because he's mad about a little trick I pulled on him a while back."

"Yes, I heard. It's a bad situation when even the polite little yellow-tailed hummingbird thinks he can beat up on a monkey."

"You heard about that, huh? Look, he left about ten little hickies on my head. It still hurts!"

"When I get hold of you, you'll have no head to have hickies on!"

"Oh yes, dear King, Monkey was cruel and thoughtless in the trick he played on you. I think he deserves your wrath, but I also think he's right about the need for a council of all the animals in the jungle because it's worse even than the monkey thinks it is."

"Worse! What do you mean Kwaku Ananse?"

"This morning I was flying over by the pass that the hairless two-leggeds used to get through the mountains. They have already begun to build a city there, and they've built a dam to trap the water there for themselves. Because of that

dam, the river that has flowed through here since before either of our grandfathers' grandfathers' grandfathers could remember is already slowed to a muddly little stream and soon will be stopped altogether.

"Yes, oh mighty King of the Jungle, the situation is very grave. In fact, King Lion, Sir, I saw one of the hunters wearing the skin of a lion for a coat. Oh, King Lion, it was a beautiful golden brown mane too."

"Truly beautiful?"

"Only slightly less beautiful than your own, Sir. It had a dark brown streak down the center—"

"With bright golden streaks on either side of the dark brown?"

"Bright golden streaks. Yes!"

"And soft white fur around the ears?"

"Yes, Your Majesty, how did you know?"

"It's my favorite cousin, Harold. I'd know him anywhere. This is terrible! What shall we do? What shall we do?"

"If there's anything I can't stand it's a wimpy lion king," the monkey muttered under his breath.

"What's that you say?" roared the lion.

"I said—"

"Mr. Monkey is grieved by the loss of your cousin, King. He said he can't stand the sight of a grieving king." Ananse cast a disapproving glare at the loose-lipped monkey before going on. "He is so overwhelmed by strong emotion that he can think of nothing sensible to say, but if you would authorize him to do so, I'm sure he'd be glad to spread the word that you'd like for all the animals in the jungle to meet to help you figure out what to do about this bad situation."

"You say the hairless, two-legged, arrow shooter was wearing my cousin's pelt as a trophy?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. And he was a rather smallish fellow too. He didn't do the beautiful lion's skin justice at all, if I must say so."

"Let there be a meeting this very night! Monk, you spread the word. But mind you, this is not the end of your troubles with me. It's just a truce until we

solve this problem."

"Oh good, Your Majesty, but if I may make a small suggestion, Sir."

"Yes, go on Ananse."

"If you held the meeting just before sunset tomorrow it would give us more time to spread the word, and those animals who don't do too well in the daytime like the owl and the mole would be able to be here, and those who are afraid to be out at night would still be able to get home before dark."

"What a bright idea, Ananse. So let it be."

When everyone came to the meeting the next night, they were all armed to the teeth. Ananse took charge of the seating arrangements. When the meeting started, they still eyed each other with great suspicion. The Lion said, "Friends, I have been worried for some time about the

way you have been fighting among each other. What do you think we should do about this problem?"

Everyone started talking at once. No one would take responsibility for anything they

were doing. "It ain't my fault if I kill somebody for trying to steal my food." "It ain't my fault if I kick you out for trying to steal my house." "It ain't my fault, you tried to take all the water."

"You did this . . ."

"You did that!"

"It ain't my fault, Oh, it ain't my fault!"

"Gr-r-r-oar-r-r! All I can hear above all the noise in here is that it ain't my fault. Yesterday I received the most disturbing news that the hairless, two-legged hunters have set up a new city near the foot of the mountain. They've built a dam so they can keep all the water to themselves, and they've got weapons that let them kill before they get close enough for you to smell them. If we don't find a way to work together, we'll destroy ourselves before the hunters get here."

*If we don't find a way to work together, we'll destroy ourselves before the hunters get here."*

"That's true," said Ms. Turtle, "The river has begun to dry up already."

"I for one see no problem," said the Jack Rabbit. "I can take care of myself and don't need help from anyone here. I'm the fastest something-or-other here. In fact, I'm leaving here now. If you don't believe I'm leaving, just count the days I'm gone."

"You may be fast of foot and quick of the lip, but your brain is slipping gears. What about the river? Mr. Rabbit is one of those who won't miss the water till the well runs dry."

"I don't need a brain to beat you, Turtle. I could beat you on one foot running backwards. I know where more water is and I won't tell you."

Seeing that she had the opportunity to teach everyone a lesson, the turtle said, "Our problem has nothing to do with how fast you are or how slow I am. Lion is right. If we'd all cooperate with each other, we could warn each other when the two-leggeds are near. We could stop them from tearing up the forest and make it a better place for all of us to live in. But you don't see that or perhaps even worse, you don't seem to care. I think the Jack Rabbit is a fool. To prove the point, I challenge him to a race around the lake."

"Ha! What madness is this? The turtle has taken leave of her senses! There's no way that she could beat me in a race."

"Not only will I win I will beat you seven times in one race."

"Such a silly riddle," the rabbit scoffed.

"Do you accept my challenge or not?"

"Of course I will take your senseless challenge."

Turning to the others at the meeting Turtle said, "Not only will I beat him but I will teach a lesson on the importance of unity. Let us meet here tomorrow at the same time to see who will win the race."

That evening Ms. Turtle called a meeting of her family.

"My dear family," she said. "This race affects all of us. If I win, it will bring honor to our family name and help us draw everyone closer together to better face the problems we have. If I lose, it will disgrace our family name and weaken our efforts to solve our prob-

lems. Please help me to win this race." They spent the evening going over the course of the race that had been laid out in the meeting and making a plan.

The next day at the appointed hour Ms. Turtle quietly ambled up to the starting line of the race. Mr. Rabbit bounced and bragged about how badly he was going to beat the turtle. "Ms. Turtle, you're headed on a senseless journey. When will you quit this race?"

Ms. Turtle quietly smiled and answered, "Not until I've been disgraced. Not until I've been disgraced." After all the ceremonies were said and done, the lion took his seat on one side of the Start/Finish Line and nodded to Mr. Bear and Bear said, "Are you ready? Get set! Go!"

Rabbit set out hopping furiously on one foot. Turtle, with determination, went as fast as she could. Rabbit made it around the first turn and could no longer see Ms. Turtle and the crowd. He stopped hot dogging and started walking like a hip cat. "You got to give yourself time to smell the flowers," he thought. He couldn't resist stopping in at Mama Bear's garden to get some of her delicious vegetables. When he went hopping on down the road, Ms. Turtle was nowhere in sight, but as he strolled around the next bend in the road there she was humping along.

"So you thought you could come sneaking by while I was getting a little refreshment. Well, I'm sorry Ms. Turtle but I'm going to leave you coughing in the dust again. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!" And off he went.

As Mr. Rabbit went hopping hurriedly for the next turn, Ms. Turtle toddled over into the lake and swam quickly over to the last turn in the road before the finish line. In their meeting the night before they'd made arrangements for six of her relatives who looked just like Ms. Turtle to swim from the starting line to different spots along the trail around the lake.

"When you hear Mr. Rabbit coming 'hippity-hop-hop, hibbity-hop-hop' along the trail toward you, just step out on the road and take up my place in the race. If he asks you, 'When will you quit this race?' each of you must answer, 'Not until I've been disgraced.' When he

has passed you by, quickly swim back to the finish line. In this way he will be racing against all of us and since we can swim faster than he can run we will be seven times the victors."

Ms. Turtle's plan worked. Each time Mr. Rabbit passed a turtle he found another diversion. Each time he became more frantic as he discovered that Ms. Turtle seemed to have overtaken him again. When he finally made the last turn sure that he had passed Ms. Turtle for the last time, he started strutting when he heard the roar of the crowd gathered near the finish line. He turned around and went into his one-foot hop. The crowd roared even louder but did not seem to be roaring at him.

Rabbit had to squench up his eyes to see that they were cheering for a shiny wet turtle striding determinedly for the finish line. Rabbit laid his ears back and raced for the last opportunity to catch up, but the turtle was completely across the line before the breathless rabbit could catch her.

"We have a winner" the lion roared. "In fact we have seven of them."

As you can imagine Mr. Rabbit was thoroughly embarrassed. Here, he of all people, the fleetest of all the animals in the forest was beat in a race by the lowly turtle—in front of everyone! It was dreadful. There were many jokes made at the rabbit's expense.

After the cheering was all over and done with, Ms. Turtle and her family explained how she and her family planned to cooperate to beat Rabbit in the race. From that day forward the animals in the forest learned how to live in flocks and herds and gaggles and prides. Some birds would scratch the elephants backs and peck the crocodiles teeth. Some would watch and call out a warning when danger came near.

Oh, fights would still break out from time to time and the lion is still not satisfied and the monkey's still signifying. But the hairless, two-legged bow and arrow shooters didn't wipe out everybody in the forest . . . at least not yet.

SE

*The stories of Junebug Jabbo Jones come to Southern Exposure via storyteller John O'Neal in New Orleans.*

Injured workers guide each other through the Workers' Compensation maze.

# Moonlighting for Justice

by Lynda McDaniel

**B**etty Cooke, a petite woman with her right hand and arm encased in a permanent brace, doesn't like to talk about her workplace accident. She speaks softly, fighting back tears, as she tells about working with improperly loaded rolls at the Brevard, North Carolina, Ecusta paper mill.

"My supervisor was with me, trying to keep the coils from slipping off the machine," Cooke said. "It was 6 p.m. and I was behind. I kept telling her how dangerous it was, but she told me to put shims in and to speed it up so I could get caught up.

"And that's exactly what I did. The very first bobbin I put on and speeded up, the machine exploded. Next thing I know, I was back against the wall six feet away, and parts of the machine had flown 12 feet away. My hand was all drawn up, I couldn't move it."

Cooke suffered electric shock and burns that required extensive hand surgery. "The day after surgery [the company] took me from the hospital back to work," she said. "I laid in this little room for two days with a small couch and a commode. All I did was cry and throw up. Monday morning they took me to the plant medical center, and I laid there for two weeks. They wanted to protect their safety record to keep it from being a lost-time accident. In the meantime, I lost 18 pounds and my hair fell out."

Cooke was unable to lift more than one pound or do repetitive work. The company could not find a job for her, she said. "I went from July to December without a paycheck," she said. "The company said I went out because of my nerves and not with my disability, so it wasn't their fault. But it is their fault I can't do anything because my hand doesn't work."

Pat Sweeney, public relations

***Cooke suffered electric shock and burns that required extensive hand surgery. "The day after surgery the company took me from the hospital back to work."***

manager for Ecusta's parent company, P. H. Glatfelter in Spring Grove, Pennsylvania, said that the company does not comment on individual accident cases.

But she said the Ecusta plant has an exemplary program for safety. According to Sweeny the plant has received safety awards from the North Carolina Department of Labor for 22 consecutive years. "We comply with all state and federal regulations and go beyond to make sure our employees have a safe working environment," Sweeny said. "We have what we believe is a very good program."

Cooke had earned \$12 an hour at Ecusta and worked two other seasonal jobs to save money for her three children. The money is now gone.

From a friend at church, Cooke learned about Injured Workers of the Carolinas, a two-year-old project of North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health, a private, nonprofit membership organization of workers, union locals, and health and legal professionals. IWOC and NIOSH provide training and technical assistance to workers on job safety and health.

Injured Workers of the Carolinas is run by volunteers who help one another through the maze of government requirements, industry mandates and the waiting — especially the waiting. Even an uncontested case can take eight

months, while a contested case can take more than two years, according to John Hensley, an attorney specializing in Workers' Compensation claims.

One of IWOC's missions is to walk people through the complex rules regarding workers' compensation. IWOC encourages employees to look out for themselves and not to assume that the company will take care of them.

NIOSH reports that each year 100 to 200 workers are killed on the job in North Carolina; 2,000 men and women die from occupational diseases; more than 9,000 new cases of occupational disease strike the state's workers, and more than 130,000 workers are injured on the job.

Jerry Stewart, president of the local United Paper Workers Union at Ecusta, has more than 20 years experience with union work and believes that most companies are going to do whatever they can to keep costs low. He believes downsizing contributes to an increase in accidents on the job. "I tell workers to do their job, and if it takes more than eight hours to do it right, don't take shortcuts and break safety regulations," he said. "For the company, the bottom line is always money."

With the support of IWOC and her attorney, Cooke is presenting her claim before the North Carolina Industrial Com-

mission, a board appointed by the governor to oversee the Workers' Compensation Act. Congress first enacted the Act in 1909 to assist anyone hurt on the job. Most states, including North Carolina, have enacted their own workers' compensation acts as well. Workers' compensation benefits pay all medical expenses and wage loss compensation at the rate of two-thirds of the average weekly salary (based on the past 12 months).

### Worker loyalty, company profits

Vickey Utter, chair of the board of directors of IWOC, sometimes wears a large button that reads: "Why is the right to die on the job the only right freely guaranteed to workers?"

Utter knows her subject well — she is a two-time survivor of workplace injury. "In 1978, I was working for Buncombe County Parks & Recreation when my hand was crushed between a tractor and a scraper," she said. "It took six surgeries to fix it. I was supervising 20 people then and felt responsible for my staff, so I went back to work immediately after the first five surgeries.

"One winter day, I was out working with my crew, and it started to sleet. The temperature kept dropping. One by one the staff started to go home. They told me they weren't paid enough to work in this kind of weather. I kept working because I wanted to finish the job. All of a sudden the pins and wires in my hand literally froze, and my fingers were locked around the pliers."

Utter drove herself to the doctor, fingers cramped around the pliers. Her hand needed more surgery, but this time the doctor refused to perform it unless she took time off. "I didn't go back to work right away, and they fired me for not being able to do my job," she said.

No one at Buncombe County Parks & Recreation could comment on Utter's 1978 injury.

Utter's own experience working while injured makes her extra-sensitive about the subject of malingering — workers pretending to be injured to collect benefits. "It's not as preva-

lent as 'Prime Time' or '60 Minutes' would lead us to believe," she said. "They don't put the real thing on [those shows]. It doesn't attract as many viewers. Besides, Southerners are different. I've known workers to take all kinds of abuse and go home and be sick there, complaining only to

their family because that's the way we were raised."

Statistics back up Utter. North Carolina paid \$11 million in lost-wage compensation, or 43 percent of the national average of \$26.5 million per state, according to a 1988 study in *Workers' Compensation Monitor*, a private newsletter. North Carolina ranked 43rd out of 45 states reporting, the study found. The state is the nation's 10th most populous. The state paid \$10.5 million in medical costs as compared to the national average of \$16 million; only nine states paid less, the study found. Other low-ranking states included Tennessee, Virginia, South Carolina, Indiana, Kansas and New Jersey.

### No-fault, low-pay insurance

Prior to enactment of the 1929 North Carolina Workers' Compensation Act, people hurt on the job were often fired with little recourse. The act was designed to provide broad coverage, with some degree of compensation to workers who were hurt by accident regardless of fault. Injured employees no longer had to prove employer's negligence to receive benefits. However, an employee dissatisfied with the Workers' Compensation settlement had to show more than negligence, according to attorney David Gantt. "If the worker shows that the employer knew with certainty someone would be hurt, the worker can sue," he said. "That's way beyond negligence — and it's not often that a court will hear even that."

But laws are only good if enforced, and the Industrial Commission does not adequately enforce its own regulations, according to attorney John Hensley. Failure to post Workers' Compensation information in every workplace, for example, or failure by employers to send in required forms may bring only a \$25 fine. Although every employer with three or more workers is required to have Workers' Compensation insurance, uninsured employers are assessed only a \$100 penalty — but anyone injured on

## TOOLBOX



For more information about groups working on occupational safety and health, contact:

### Alice Hamilton Occupational Health Center

410 Seventh Street, S.E.  
Washington, DC 20003  
(202) 543-0005 (DC)  
(310) 731-8630 (MD)

### Carolina Alliance for Fair Employment (CAFE)

1 Chick Spring Road, Suite 103  
Greenville, SC 29609  
(803) 235-2926

### Concerned Citizens to Improve Workers Comp.

c/o Anita Lawrence  
P.O. Box 546  
Collinsville, VA 24078  
(540) 632-0013 Fax (540) 632-6002

### Injured Workers of the Carolinas and NCOSH (North Carolina COSH)

PO Box 2514  
Durham, NC 27715  
(919) 286-9249  
1-800-64N-COSH  
HN2100@Handsnet.org

### Louisiana Injured Workers' Union

c/o Bill Temmick  
926 Milan St.  
New Orleans, LA 70115  
(504) 899-4194 Fax (504) 899-4154

### TexCOSH

c/o Karyl Dunson  
5735 Regina  
Beaumont, TX 77706  
(409) 898-1427

their site is left with no compensation. The average fine for serious violations that threaten injury or death is \$1,024, according to NIOSH.

When employees don't feel they've gotten just compensation, they turn to fellow workers for support. At a recent meeting of the Injured Workers of the Carolinas, one frail, elderly woman told how the tips of her fingers on her right hand were crushed at work. "I almost bled to death," she said. "They didn't even find me a way to Asheville to the hospital. My daughter-in-law lost a day's work on her own job for taking me. The next day they came and got me. I could barely walk, and they took me to work, me on heavy pain killer. I had to lay down in the locker room and sleep."

She asked to remain anonymous, afraid she would lose any chance to return to work. "For two weeks they sent the chauffeur to get me," she said. "They kept me there because they didn't want a lost-time accident."

She is now back at work, operating a grinding wheel with only cloth gloves to protect her hands — against doctor's orders, according to Utter. She feels coerced and intimidated, fearing the company is trying to force early retirement on her. Utter has heard dozens of stories like this one.

"Most people have to pay bills, feed kids — you've got to find a job even if you are dying," she said. "They don't treat dogs like this. They don't treat criminals like this. That's what IWOC is all about — trying to get it into people's heads that they are human, that they do have rights."

SE

*This story was funded by a grant from the Fund for Investigative Reporting, a western North Carolina research and reporting organization in Asheville.*

# Workers: Know Your Rights

## What are Workers' Compensation benefits?

Benefits should be paid to workers who were hurt on the job or made sick because of their work. Benefits cover all medical expenses and compensate for lost wages if you cannot work. Laws vary from state to state.

## What if you are injured or become ill from your work?

1. Take care of your health. See your doctor and state that your problem is work-related. Show the doctor how you do your job, and tell him/her about chemicals, dusts, noise or other hazards you work with. If a doctor thinks you should not work, or work only with restrictions, get it in writing and keep a copy. Do not leave work, or you can lose your rights!
2. File the required notification form with your state's Workers' Compensation Commission. This form is simple and serves as an official record that you were injured. Be specific about your injury or problem. Keep a copy for yourself and give one to your employer. You can lose your right to workers' compensation benefits if you do not notify your employer in writing, usually within 30 days, depending on the law in your state. Your employer is required by law to file a separate form to notify the state, in addition to any paperwork that they file with their workers' compensation insurance carrier.
3. Keep written records. Collect information and copies of everything. Write down exactly what happened. Get names and addresses of people who can corroborate your story.
4. To remain eligible for workers' compensation benefits, you must see the health care provider your employer suggests, take the treatment or therapies recommended and go back to work when the doctor sends you. In some states, you may be entitled to a second opinion, but you may have to pay for it yourself and apply to the Commission for reimbursement.
5. If your employer refuses to pay you benefits, you can request a hearing with the state Workers' Compensation Commission. This can take a year or more. You should have a lawyer if you appeal because the law is complex and your future benefits are at risk. Both you and your employer are entitled to appeal the case to the Commission.

## Protect Your Rights

- File your claim before the deadline in your state. Often, you have two years — once you've realized that the problem is work-related — to file the claim. After that, you lose your rights.
- Get advice from a worker advocacy group or an attorney who specializes in workers' compensation before you make major decisions about your case. (See Toolbox section for groups in your area.)
- Don't accept a clincher, or lump-sum agreement, without getting advice from a lawyer. If you sign a clincher, you give up your rights to any future claims regarding that injury or illness.

— Betsy Barton

*Betsy Barton is training coordinator with North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Project (NCOSH).*

## Further Reading

*Job-Damaged People: How to Survive and Change the Workers' Comp System*, by Amy Clipp. Published by the Environmental Health Network and the Louisiana Injured Workers' Union, 1993. To order, call (504) 899-4194.

*Workers' Compensation Handbook: A Guide to Understanding the Laws in North Carolina*. Edited by Natasha Nazareth. Third Edition, 1996. Published by North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Project. To order, call (919) 286-9249.

## THE MYTH OF AUNT JEMIMA: REPRESENTATIONS OF RACE AND REGION

By Diane Roberts  
Routledge  
\$15.95 (paper)  
1994

By Kevin O'Kelly

Consider a joke making the rounds in Mississippi after LisaMarie Presley's marriage:

Q: How do we know Elvis is really dead?

A: 'Cause if he wasn't, he woulda come back and killed Michael Jackson.

Or consider a statistic announced by the National Public Opinion Center the summer of O. J. Simpson's arraignment: four out of five Americans believed interracial marriage should be illegal.

These stories show the continuing prevalence of white anxiety about manifestations of black sexuality. It is this anxiety that provides the basis of Diane Roberts' *The Myth of Aunt Jemima*, a critical survey of white women's writings about race. As the incidents cited above indicate, the subtext of issues will be eerily familiar to most Southern readers whether they've read the books she discusses or not.

Roberts discusses more than a dozen books written between the end of the 17th century and the middle of the 20th. An English professor at the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, Roberts discusses theoretical issues in an accessible manner. She also gives vignettes of social history that should intrigue anyone interested in race and gender relations in America.

As a survey *Aunt Jemima* is uneven. Discussion of the 19th century accounts for two thirds of the book. But the author ranges across enough historical periods to make it clear that American racism and its attendant sexual neuroses have long been with us.

The prototype of the works Roberts discusses is Aphra Behn's *Oronooko* (1688), the story of an enslaved African prince who leads a revolt in English Surinam. The novel's ingredients foreshadow books to come. A white woman is both attracted to and fearful of a black



man. The author had set up a tension that could not be resolved happily, not in that era. The story ends with a lynching.

Roberts' survey begins in earnest with her discussion of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the 1851 anti-slavery novel that inspired abolitionists and infuriated the white Southern establishment. To Stowe, slavery's greatest crime was its violation of family integrity. Slavery provided white men constant temptation to infidelity in the form of black women unable to refuse them. Slavery also meant that buying and selling decisions of slave owners determined whether black families remained together.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* proved inflammatory in part because Stowe demonstrated — as did most of the other authors discussed in Roberts' book — the unreliability of supposedly fundamental categories of Southern society. Slaves are freed; white women turn out to be black; a woman successfully disguises herself as a man to escape slavery.

Reactions to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* showed that white Southerners identified the status quo with sexual mores. They reviled the book as pornography and its author as a fallen woman. They accused Stowe of being sexually attracted to black men. Since racial mixing would inevitably result from abolition, what else would motivate a white woman to attack slavery?

In addition to illustrating connections

between racial and sexual issues in the antebellum mind, the 19th century chapters provide intriguing glimpses of American social history. Roberts examines the life of Fanny Kemble, the English actress who married an American slave owner. *Kemble's Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation* gives one of the more graphic white accounts of slavery. In the *Journal*, Roberts discovers a white woman who began to identify with her husband's slaves and whose use of the simplest gestures and courtesies crossed the distances created by caste. Roberts finds irony in the experience of a woman who defied the prevailing society in the 19th century; Fanny Kemble, who attacked slavery as antithetical to the integrity of marriages and families, was divorced by her husband and deprived of her children.

However interesting the subject and however thorough the analyses, Roberts never resolves the division of her loyalties between idealism and practicality in *Aunt Jemima*. She criticizes Frances Wright, a British abolitionist and advocate of free love, for flouting American mores. Wright's work "failed... because she did not understand the absolute division of genders, races, and acceptable behavior on which American society sustained itself." Yet Roberts implicitly criticizes the anti-slavery writer Lydia Maria Child for being too conventional. In her novel *The Romance of the Republic* (1867), Child's "ruined" mulatta heroines eventually assume upper-middle class lives. To Roberts, so conventional an ending is a sellout: "Child does not look past Victorian gender roles... [she] prescribes ladyhood for her ex-slave heroines, privileging their white genteel heritage rather than their African heritage." Such a dismissal ignores Robert's earlier criticism of free love advocate Frances Wright. The author also ignores the dependence by anti-slavery works such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* upon their appeal to values the 19th-century reading public already endorsed.

But such problems are the comparatively minor consequences of a general incompleteness. Roberts discusses stock African-American female characters: Aunt Jemima represents the servant who is all devotion and nurturance. The black



Jezebel is the whore who is all sex. For Roberts, both Jemima and Jezebel demonstrate a psychological division of labor necessary for Southern white society's vision of itself. The dualistic moral world of the upper and middle classes was made possible only by transferring the more complicated sides of human nature to another part of town, another social class, another race. The analysis she provides is provocative, and if she had woven it into her discussions of each of the books, *The Myth of Aunt Jemima* would be a much more focused book.

The 20th-century chapters do offer a good sense of the Southern white psyche in relation to race and gender — as perceived by the white women who wrote about racial issues. The white middle-class men in Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* (1944) go to "Colored Town" for sex, "something you can't get here in White Town." These men want mothers and wives who are ladies in the traditional Southern sense. To them that means an absence of sexuality. These men also want to indulge a side of themselves that has no place in the home of the "lady" — at least as they believe she exists. To justify the use of prostitutes, they believe that some women are born whores. Thus both racism and sexism stem from a need to sustain a childishly simplistic view of reality. This is the inference Roberts draws from the story of interracial love and sexual exploitation in *Strange Fruit*.

According to Roberts' discussion of Lillian Smith's fictional mammies, the Aunt Jemima ideal supports a white middle-class sense of security and virtue. A kind Christian family can justify employing someone at low wages to fill exhausting jobs of nanny and housekeeper if some women are naturally loving and subservient, if they are menial fairy godmothers.

Categorizing black women as either Jezebels or Jemimas, Roberts writes, was a necessary self-justification in a theoretically democratic society that actually minimized the social responsibilities of the most powerful class — white men.

And as Roberts hints by her allusions to the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill hearings, the issues she discusses in *Aunt Jemima* are still with us. Roberts' analysis of the tangled relationship between rac-

ism and gender stereotyping is as much disheartening as enlightening. A hundred years after emancipation, and 25 years after integration, we haven't learned a damned thing.

Kevin O'Kelly works at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and writes book reviews.

## Interesting New Books

**Dan T. Carter.** *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* Simon & Schuster, 1995. \$30

The award-winning author tells the chilling story of "the most influential loser in 20th-century American politics," by showing how the 1960's anti-integration campaign of the governor of Alabama evolved into a national conservative movement.

**Constance Curry.** *Silver Rights*, introduction by **Marian Wright Edelman** Algonquin, 1995. \$21.95

Taken from the term some Southern blacks used for civil rights, this book draws on letters and interviews between the author and the Carter family in Drew, Mississippi, to describe the family's heroic battle to send eight of their children to an all-white high school.

**Miriam DeCosta-Willis, editor.** *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells* Beacon, 1995. \$14

An honest, searching account by a famous Southern black leader of the journey she made from schoolteacher to anti-lynching crusader a hundred years ago.

**Pete Earley.** *Circumstantial Evidence: Death, Life, and Justice in a Southern Town* Bantam, 1995. \$23.95

A well-told story of the first person in Alabama wrongfully convicted of murder to be released from death row.

**Robert Gordon.** *It Came from Memphis* Faber and Faber, 1995. \$23

The story of blues and rock 'n' roll in Memphis in the 1960s is a history of a great musical time and place.

**Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, editor.** *Love, War, and the 96th Engineers (Colored)* University of Illinois Press, 1995. \$26.95

A white, Jewish civil engineer from Louisiana is assigned to command a regiment of African Americans in New Guinea during World War II. These excerpts from his diaries and letters reveal a young man's growing awareness of racial issues.

**Isaiah Madison.** *Development with Dignity* Institute for Southern Studies, 1995. \$30

*Southern Exposure* publisher has produced a report of a four-year study of 50 economic development organizations across the South.

**Charles M. Payne.** *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the*

*Mississippi Freedom Struggle* University of California Press, 1995. \$28

Just when you think we've seen every book on Mississippi Freedom summer that could be written, another one comes along. But this is worth a mention because Payne is a really good historian/writer. This book also won the 1995 Lillian Smith Book award.

**John Salmond.** *Gastonia 1929: The Story of the Lory Mill Strike* University of North Carolina Press, 1995. \$24.95

This is the first full-length book on the famous Communist-led textile strike made famous in part by death of strike leader Ella Mae Wiggins.

**Maggie Lee Sayre.** *'Deaf Maggie Lee Sayre': Photographs of a River Life*, edited by **Tom Rankin** University Press of Mississippi, 1995. \$35 (hardback) \$17.95 (paper)

A remarkable collection of photographs of a lifestyle nearly lost — traditional riverboat culture in Kentucky and Tennessee — preserved for us thanks to the artistic eye of Maggie Lee Sayre, a deaf woman from Kentucky, now 75 years old.

**Mary Lee Settle.** *Choices* Doubleday, 1995. \$24.95

The newest novel by the author of *The Beulah Quintet*, and other works, has won the 1995 Lillian Smith Book award. A young girl from West Virginia travels from one battlefield to the next witnessing a bloody Kentucky coal miners' strike of the Depression, the Spanish Civil War, London during World War II, and the civil rights movement of the 1950s.

**George Brown Tindall.** *Natives and New-comers: Ethnic Southerners & Southern Ethnicities* University of Georgia Press, 1995. \$15

The Kenan Professor of History Emeritus at University of North Carolina traces the changes in the South's population over the past 200 years.

**Emilio Zamora.** *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* Texas A&M University Press, 1995. \$15.95 (paper), \$39.50 (hardback)

The winner of the H.L. Mitchell Award shows the culture and everyday life of Mexicans living in Texas and the impact of American economic policy.

### VIDEO:

**With Fingers of Love** University of Alabama Center for Public Television, 30 minute video, \$25, 1994

When a group of black women from Wilcox County, Alabama, founded a quilting cooperative in 1966, they raised living standards for its members, ignited nationwide interest in the art of quilting, and inspired other coops.

**Roving Pickets** directed by **Anne Lewis Johnson** Appalshop, 28 minutes, \$150 VHS, \$60 rental, 1991

This film locates the roots of LBJ's War on Poverty throughout the — often violent — struggles of Eastern Kentucky miners and their families against massive wage cuts and unemployment in the early 1960s.

— Compiled by Wendy Grossman, Janet Irons, Dana Clark Felty, and Pat Arrow

A true red menace is marching north.

# Fire Ants

By Mary Lee Kerr

**S**outherners are used to plagues and problems. They've been taken over by everything from Union soldiers to kudzu to waste industries. But now they're feeling the sting of a new threat — fire ants.

"Fire ants are a true pest," says Anne-Marie Callcott of the USDA's Fire Ant Laboratory in Gulfport, Mississippi. "They cause widespread damage to people, crops, and wildlife across the South."

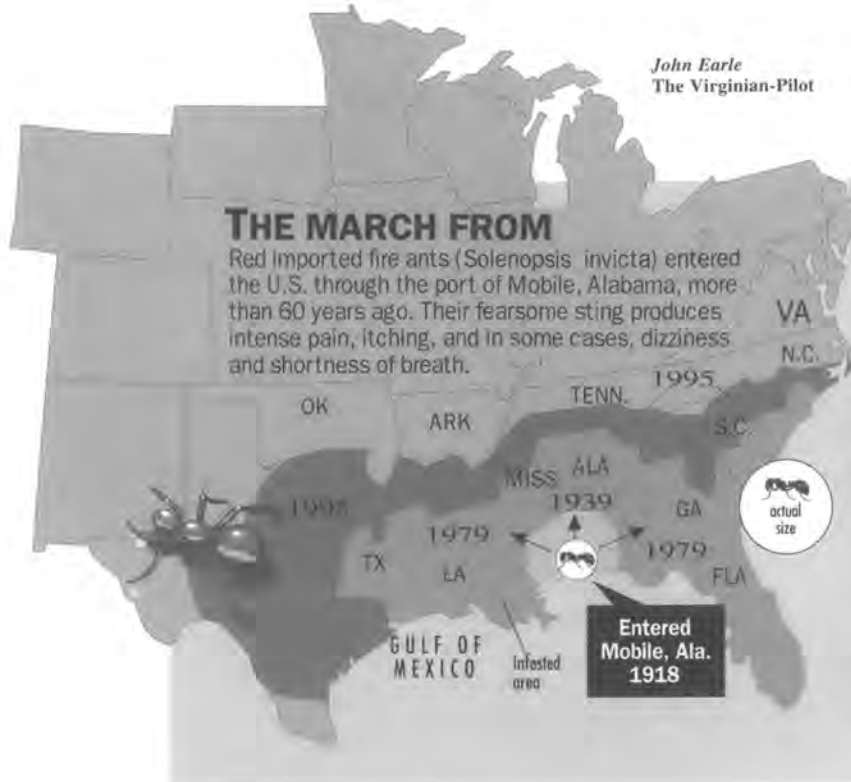
These red-bellied, black-bodied insects an eighth of an inch long aren't the ants of summer picnics, crushed with the swipe of a hand. Fire ants are fierce. They form extensive underground labyrinths and two- to three-foot mounds that contain as many as 250,000 ants. When disturbed, they attack to protect their nest and queen, climbing on a human victim, sending a signal for all ants to bite, and bite repeatedly.

Most victims experience sharp pain and blistering from fire ant bites, but the sting can cause severe allergic reactions in some and even death. An American Academy of Allergy and Immunology study found that 32 people had died from fire ant stings in one year alone when their respiratory systems shut down after being bitten. More than 20,000 seek medical attention for bites each year, according to the USDA.

The fire ant came from the jungles of Brazil aboard cargo ships into the port of Mobile, Alabama, in about 1918 and again in the 1930s. By the 1940s and '50s, the insects had started spreading across the South with human help — in pots of popular shrubs. In the early 1950s the federal government began an eradication process in 11 Southern states using pesticides sprayed from World War II airplanes. By the 1970s the chemicals were banned, and the government let the states take over.

While most fire ants inhabit Texas and Florida, they've moved as far north as Tennessee and Virginia. The insects seem impossible to eradicate completely. Like cockroaches, they're true survivors, flying on to start new nests when old ones are destroyed, clinging together in balls to float on flood waters, and procreating and spreading northward at the rate of 30 miles a year. Only a hard freeze will stop them.

The economic and human cost of their invasion has been enormous. The ants have destroyed Florida citrus trees by eat-



## THE MARCH FROM

Red imported fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) entered the U.S. through the port of Mobile, Alabama, more than 60 years ago. Their fearsome sting produces intense pain, itching, and in some cases, dizziness and shortness of breath.

ing the bark off them, killed young birds and small animals, and even chewed through electrical insulation to shut down air conditioners and traffic lights. Farmers complain that they clog up farm machinery and cause millions of dollars worth of crop damage.

Residents of infested areas can't sit in the grass or let their children play barefoot outside. And people sensitive to the ants must beware of the possibly deadly venom from their stings.

"I was told my allergy level was so high that I should move immediately," says Sharon Renfrow. "Doctors said I would die if I were bitten again." Renfrow, a social worker, moved from Texas to the mountains of Tennessee to avoid the red menace. When she discovered fire ant mounds outside the hospital where she worked in Tennessee, she moved again with her husband and children to the colder climate of Maine, where she finally feels safe.

Although fire ants are a serious threat in the South, trust Southerners to find a lighter side to the mandibled peril. Thirteen years ago the town of Marshall, Texas, started holding annual fire ant festivals to pay homage to the stinging insect and make it part of the local culture.

"East Texas is very well known for fire ants," says Phyllis Prince, special events coordinator for the Marshall Chamber of Commerce. "In October when we hold the festival, the ants are especially productive. We decided this would be an original way to make fun of them."

The festival features costumed Freddie the Fire Ant, his wife Elvira, baby Sugar — and Anthony Andro the anteater. There are chili-eating contests (you have to add an ant to the bowl to make it really hot), a fire ant roundup and a competition to see who can let loose with the best fire ant mating call. It's a time to have fun and forget the insect's destructive side. As Prince says, "we have a fun, whacky weekend." But, as USDA's Callcott warns, "be sure to look before you sit down."

**S**

Mary Lee Kerr is a freelance writer in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

# SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Don't miss '96  
Best of the Press

The finest reporting  
from Southern newspapers  
**Politics**

Before the election, get the lowdown on  
those elected officials.

**Green Index**

Updates on the environmental  
report card

## Universal Health Care Make It Happen

Honor activist and musician Anne  
Romaine and support organizing for  
universal health care. Send donations to:

**Anne Romaine Memorial Fund,**  
c/o Fund for Southern Communities,  
547 Ponce de Leon Ave. NE, Ste. 100  
Atlanta, GA 30308

Announcing the New . . .

## Journal of Appalachian Studies

We invite you to subscribe to the new, official journal of the Appalachian Studies Association, a multi-disciplinary organization of scholars, writers, activists, and others concerned with the Appalachian region.

The Journal features:

- Articles on history, social sciences, and the humanities.
- An extensive book review section and annual bibliography.
  - Selected papers from the annual Appalachian Studies conference, highlighting new work.

Published twice per year. Annual subscription: \$30 / individuals,  
\$15 / students (with proof), \$35 / institutions.

Send check (made out to Journal of Appalachian Studies) to:  
Journal of Appalachian Studies, P.O. Box 6825, West Virginia University,  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6825.

Send manuscript and editorial inquiries to Ronald L. Lewis, Editor.

Phone: 304-293-8541. Fax: 304-293-6699. E-mail:  
RRIASA@WVNVM.WVNET.EDU

## JOB

### Director of the Institute for Southern Studies

The Institute for Southern Studies, with its 25-year history of groundbreaking research, investigative reporting, education, organizing, and community development work in the South, is looking for a director. The director should be good at fundraising, financial oversight, staff support and supervision, board and organization development. We need someone who is deeply committed to social, economic, and racial justice; has an understanding and analysis of issues in grassroots communities in the Southeast; has strong communication and organizational skills, experience with financial management, and ability to build a team. Our ideal director would bring a vision of how the Institute can play a strategic role in building the social justice movement, along with an ability to think creatively about how to use resources. We believe in affirmative action and equal opportunity employment. Pay is \$30,000-\$32,000, and health insurance is included. The job starts between August 1 and September 1. Call (919) 419-8311, ext. 25.

## OPINIONS

**WE WANT YOURS.** The Institute for Southern Studies is doing an assessment. We've been researching, organizing, and publishing for 25 years, and we don't want to make the mistake of doing what we've always done just because that's what we've always done. **So what do you think?** Given the rise of the right, what is our most valuable role right now? What have we done extraordinarily well in our 25 years of raising hell? What have we done that doesn't make much sense? What about *Southern Exposure*? Is it all you want from the "Voice of the South?" Call Tema Okun at 919-419-8311 ext. 25, or Fax 919-419-8315 or E-mail SExpos@aol.com

U.S. Postal Service  
STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION  
Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685

Title of Publication: Southern Exposure

Publication No: 0534-70

Date of Filing: December 21, 1995 - Frequency of Issue: Quarterly -  
Published 4 times annually - Subscription Price: \$24 - Mailing Address  
of known office of publication: P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702 -  
Mailing Address of headquarters or general business office: P.O. Box  
531, Durham, NC 27702.

Publisher: Institute for Southern Studies, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC  
27702.

Editor and Managing Editor: Pat Arnow, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC  
27702.

Owner: Institute for Southern Studies (a nonprofit 501 (c) (3)), P.O.  
Box 531, Durham, NC 27702  
Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and other Security Holders Owning  
or Holding 1% or more of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or other  
Securities: NONE.

The purpose, function and nonprofit status of this organization and  
the exempt status for federal income tax purposes have not  
changed during the preceding 12 months.

	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 months	Actual No. Copies Single Issue Published Nearest to Billing Date
Total No. Copies (Net Press Run)	4326	3400
Paid Circulation:		
(Sales through dealers, carriers, street vendors and counter sales)	2170	280
(Mail Subscriptions):	2026	2280
Total Paid Circulation	4196	2560
Free Distribution (by mail or other means: samples, complimentary and other free copies)	60	50
Total Distribution	4256	2610
Copies not Distributed:		
(Office use, leftover, unaccounted for, spoiled after printing)	20	720
(Returns from News Agents)	50	70
Total	4326	3400

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct.  
Sharon Ugochukwu, Finance/Circulation

## AN ATTACK ON THE NATIONAL SECURITY STATE

ISBN: 0-9648241-0-8

The most blistering story  
to evade media monopoly  
control this year, about  
citizens who are breaking  
laws to bring public attention  
to "defense" spending that continues at a higher  
level than the cold war average — sans *Evil  
Empire!*

\$10.00 to: Dreamstoker Press  
11712-C Jefferson Ave.  
Newport News, VA 23606



**SOUTHERN EXPOSURE**  
**P.O. Box 531**  
**Durham, NC 27702**

SPR-96 37445 107  
LINDA MOORE  
223 FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE  
WINSTON SALES, NC 27106