

**THE LITTLE BOOK OF
LYNCHING**

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PART ONE:

APPOMATTOXIC

PREFACE

APPOMATTOX AND LYNCHBURG: A TALE OF TWO CITIES

“I hate spooks and I don’t care who knows.”

“Fyi..most blacks are under handed lying lazy human turds.”

“You freeloading apes need lip liposuction and a job.”

“I ain’t seen a porch chimp I couldn’t slap stupider than they already are. You monkeys don’t want none of this white guy. I don’t do drugs and I’m strong and healthy. I remember grandpa telling me about how the blacks would step to the side when a white person was walking down the sidewalk. Those must have been good days.”

“Faithful Word Baptist Church on MSNBC! Our church was talked about on MSNBC tonight. Baptist Pastor Prays For President Obama To Die & Go To Hell. While we’re at it we’ll make sure to pray for the queers to die as well. If Barack Obama & all the queers died tonight then this country would be a much better place.”

(The above sentiments are taken from TOPIX.COM, from the town of Appomattox, the city of Lynchburg, and from the FIGHTING FUNDAMENTAL FORUMS, the chat universe of Jerry Falwell’s own Liberty University. Specific sourcing will be given again later in the book. I am hoping these quotations will give you a sense of what it is like to live in Appomattox, Virginia, with its ubiquity of “the N word”.)

America is at a crossroads: even in the twenty-first century, black men are still being lynched. They are found hanging from trees, shot down in the streets, beaten to death,

dragged behind trucks, rolled up in gym mats, and, later, in nearly the same spot, again, found hanging from trees. Crime scenes are treated like picnic grounds, witnesses are completely ignored, evidence is destroyed, and sometimes, the presence of white supremacist literature near the body or white hooded figures in the vicinity is treated as an odd yet uninteresting coincidence by those responsible for investigating a homicide. Those responsible for uncovering the truth.

For far too large a faction of the country, lynchings are fodder for Klanish Klass Klowns: forums, rant pages, and websites abound with the most grim and grisly of jokes.

“What do you call five niggers hanging from a tree?”

“A Mississippi wind chime!”

More often than not, the incidents are rarely deemed worthy of even local headlines, and our apathy about the minimal reportage casts an ugly shadow over the American dream, and American principles in which we claim to so fervently believe. Some of these lynchings go under the guise of police overzealousness, some are still committed as acts of vigilantism, under cover of darkness, sometimes by hooded men. And still others, appallingly enough, are categorized as suicides, all evidence to the contrary. In dozens of these cases every year, official investigations are shoddy at best. And police don't just ignore those black men who turn up hanging in a prison cell: young Afro-Americans with lives full of promise turn up dead, and nobody seems to care. And the evil phenomenon is spreading, so that now, gays, Muslims, Jews, and a host of other “Others” are finding themselves the target of hate crimes and lynching.

Whether or not we decide, as a collective conscience, to change this perspective will largely determine whether or not America is the country she purports to be. The America that her Founding Fathers wished her to be, planned for her to be--prayed for her to be, even. (Granted, two thirds of the Founding Fathers owned slaves, but the other third spoke out passionately against it, and the fact that all of them risked a traitor's execution to put our system of government in place is worth something; it is that Constitution, that government, and that very system of laws which would later allow the Civil Rights Movement to make the progress that it has. It would make possible President of the United States Barack Obama.)

Then again, God blessed country though we be, America is ***always*** at a crossroads; it is weekly at a crossroads: will we or will we not go to war, will we heed the warnings of global warming, will we raise the debt ceiling and bankrupt future generations, will we ever get control of our gun violence, will we or will we not spy on our populus writ large, will we provide health care to the less fortunate among us, or will we create a nation of entitled coddlebutts. Will we continue to get fatter, poorer, and--I hate to say it--stupider?

Or at least less educated.

The litany of the constant crossroads that we, as a country, find ourselves facing sounds like the literary version of bargain basement knock-off goods: the opening paragraph of Dickens', but texted: "a tail of 2 cities," "Our version of," imposter brand.

Yes, we are always at a crossroads.

And yet, this one seems to me to be more important than most. For while I am not one to minimize the end of the world as we know it, be that by thermonuclear war or the greenhouse effect, the issue with the way we treat Afro-Americans--black men, in particular--is a nagging problem. It is either an embarrassment, or a crisis, depending on how passionately you feel about the subject. We got it wrong from the beginning, and we are still getting it wrong. Horribly, cruelly, disgustingly, mortifyingly wrong, in far too many cases.

Whether or not we begin to fix it will determine how we are judged by future generations.

Hell, for that matter, everybody is judging us for that right now.

And this from a Registered Republican. Although, for the Fair and Balanced record, I have noticed virtually no Fox News coverage of this tragic human emergency.

True, many of these lynchings took place not last week, but last decade, or even last century. But does the fact that justice was not served in these cases make it any more acceptable, merely because time has passed? If your twenty or thirty year old daughter or son had not lived to see the life they enjoy now, and had instead been murdered when they were younger, would it somehow be less painful or more OK now, because a few years or decades have passed? After all, time heals all wounds, and all that crap, even if the killers went free?

Of course not. In fact, I surmise that the anger and agony would increase incrementally, as the powers-that-be appeared to care less and less about seeking justice for the senseless killing of your child. But that is precisely what is happening, all too often, in the lynching cases of American black men and boys.

I never used to think about any of this much because, like most Americans, I didn't even know hardly anything about it.

But then I moved to Appomattox, Virginia. Now, to be fair, I don't know of any lynchings that have taken place in Appomattox. Then again, we don't know about most of the lynchings that took place during the first couple of centuries of this country's history: nobody cared enough to document them, so not knowing about them doesn't mean they didn't happen. But I did, while in Appomattox, encounter a shocking level of ugly racism that caused me to think long and hard about the injustices blacks experience daily in certain parts of this country. And that made me start digging. Searching around to

determine what conditions needed to be present in order for a hate crime to occur.
This book is a chronicle of those hate crimes.

INTRODUCTION

OF POOLS, SCHOOLS, AND GOLDEN RULES

“This city stinks of black ignorance and laziness. It is time to put these animals back in the cage.”

“I hope all these spooks kill each other off around here .”

“A blue gum walked out in front of my car this morning on rivermont ave. with ratty dread locks, his pants sagging smoking a joint..I tried to run over the lazy ape but missed by a few inches.”

“KKK Rally this weekend, Sat. 9pm@ at Wade and Son Garage. Dont let the sun set on your ass spooks..”

Like all epic man-made disasters, it seemed like a good idea at the time. A very fine idea. Sick of the Los Angeles rat race, I would move to a small town, a Mayberry if you will, and live out my life in pastoral peace and tranquility.

Regarding Hollywood: everything bad you hear about it these days is true, and all too much of that which was magical and wonderful about the City of Lost Angels is now, well, to coin a phrase, “Gone With The Wind”. Life had become all but impossible to live, behind the Tinsel Curtain. L.A. was crowded and crime-ridden, pretentious and polluted, full of gridlock and rage and drugs and angst. Someone once said of the filthy air there: that’s not smog, it’s the dissipated dreams of millions, settling into the sky and clogging the lungs of all the new people who step off the bus, full of hope, just waiting to be victims of a city that eats people alive.

Oh wait. I said that.

Mostly, the city has kind of sort of gone nuts. As a matter of fact, the entire state is in deep doo doo. They are contemplating chopping it up into a bunch of little, troubled, faux states. And Oregon isn’t much better. As a matter of fact that entire west coast is deeply troubled.

I always Google the news every morning before I write: today, we are still searching

for the mysteriously vanished Malaysian Airlines airplane, and buildings have blown up in Harlem, meanwhile the Crimea and Syria remain political infernos, filled with human suffering, with millions of the victims being innocent children.

And what does the Left Coast of Los Estados Unidos have to add to the day's events? A man called 911 because his cat had trapped his family in the bathroom. And, just in case you're thinking that the story can't get any weirder, the police actually answered the call. And, just in case you're thinking that the story can't get any weirder, the cat is now in therapy.

Yes, my friends. It was time to leave California, before the gods do the sensible thing and just chuck it into the sea, after one fine flying thunderbolt hurled right at the San Andreas Fault.)

A small town seemed like the ideal solution. I had lived in several major cities, and the advantages had never quite outweighed the negatives. And I had been a Virginian for most of my life. Why not return to the Old Dominion?

Plus, the town I had chosen, Appomattox, was no ordinary small town. Because of its unique place in history, it was visited by nearly 200,000 tourists a year, so it seemed like the perfect place to launch my new project--although it was, in point of fact, a project I had been working on for a decade and a half: a miniature museum, complete with forty dollhouses, a couple of trains, plus thousands of miniatures crammed into the displays.

Life and a miniature museum in a country hamlet. Living out my days in the town where peace was born. It sounded ideal. It sounded perfect.

Within the first week of my arriving, The Creep Factor reared its ugly head. A fat man with a white bushy beard, a local, known for daily frequenting the Appomattox McDonald's, started bellowing at the top of his lungs about "***the niggers loving a good fight!***" And as if that isn't bad enough, nobody batted an eye. They just kept shoveling their hamburgers into their mouths.

When I started nosing around about joining political organizations in the town, the first thing that come up on Google was a news story that had gone viral: The local skinhead white supremacists had defaced the Obama campaign signs on the lawn of a local black family; "**KKK**" and "**NIGGER**" were spewed across Obama's name in ugly, eerie black spray paint.

My new landlord, before he even knew me, was kind enough to warn me about how the blacks in the town were "***getting mighty uppity.***"

Trucks, bumper stickers, store fronts, parlor windows, antebellum porches, and flagpoles in God-Bless-America-green perfectly manicured front yards proudly waved

and displayed the Stars and Bars--once a proud symbol of the Confederacy, yes, but now a known symbol of the Ku Klux Klan.

A woman who was going to share my business space carped and explained about the previous business that had been in the building: it had failed because it was ***“run by lazy niggers”*** .

At the Railroad Festival, hailed as fun and friendly, a woman wearing an Obama button is accosted and ridiculed by some youths from town: ***“YOU KNOW HE’S BLACK, DON’T YOU?”***

KKK flyers appear in driveways and on windshields after Obama wins a second term.

My gay friend Vincent, as I am driving him to work, points to a large black truck that pulls up next to us at a stop light: ***“See that guy?”*** Vincent asks, as the driver gives us the stink-eye. ***“That’s the head of the local Ku Klux Klan. He confronted me one night when I was working swing shift at the all night Huddle House. He asked me if I was gay. He told me what he thought of me... Scared the crap out of me...”***

Then came the Cequan Haskins incident.

CHAPTER ONE

CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

“When God has draw a line of distinction, we should not attempt to cross that line. The true Negro does not want integration.” -Quotation by Jerry Farwell

“One of last human-only high schools now importing niggers. Their quick decline into violence and savagery now begins.”

“It can play feetsball. It gets a skolaship. It gits to rape da white gurls now”

“Lynchburg is a hive for biggoty lazy freeloading drug dealing stinky blacks on welfare. I am bringing in some hardcore soldiers with the KKK from surrounding areas to help clean up this ghetto city The klan is coming in from 5 districts to wage war on these monkeys.”

Why this book? Why write another book about lynchings in America?

Certainly, there are already dozens of books about the history of lynchings, describing in grisly detail both individual atrocities and the phenomena en masse. Eyewitness accounts, archived articles, and morbid postcards of lynchings long past haunt the 21st century internet. Hardly a high profile white-on-black crime hits the airwaves and undergoes pundit analysis, without us hearing the name of “Emmett Till” being invoked. And the vicious hate crimes perpetrated upon other ostracized groups also hearken back to unconscionable events of the recent past: No serious discussion of LGBT rights or harassment can transpire without mentioning the names of Matthew Shepard and Harvey Milk. (For our purposes, it is important to realize that the definition of lynching has expanded in modern parlance, from meaning a straightforward stringing up of some guilty or quite probably innocent human being, to any act of vigilante justice carried out extra-judicially by an angry mob, or a small band of murderous thugs.)

So, why this book? The topic is not new. Why, indeed:

Because, to quote Santayana--perhaps one of the most cited of all human caveats: **“Those who do not remember the past, are doomed to repeat it.”** Surely, then, given the evidence, we must be in a constant state of forgetting, addled about not merely the crime, but also the ugliness which spins out from it, like ripples in Charon’s River Styx. Because we certainly seem to be perpetually dooming ourselves, as a society, to repeating the same hateful crimes again, and again, and again. Perhaps, then, the mythical metaphor of Sisyphus would be more apt.

Because most of you have probably heard of James Byrd, but I'm betting you haven't heard of Anthony Hill or Theresa Ardoin--both Afro-American victims of dragging deaths as well. Nor have you probably heard of Brandon McClelland, run over and then dragged by two white co-workers. Even though one of the white men admitted to purposely running over Brandon McClelland in the arrest affidavit, both killers were acquitted, and then the Ku Klux Klan showed up loud and proud at the courthouse, to give moral support to the guilty parties.

Because most of you have probably heard of Matthew Shepard, but not of Timothy Lee, the twenty-three year old gay black man who, on November 2nd, 1986, at about one a.m., "committed suicide" at a public bus stop, in spite of having just won a scholarship to study fashion in Milan. It was an odd suicide, with the victim leaving behind a suicide note in which he inexplicably misspelled the names of everybody in his family--including his own. Also, there were the screams, and then the sound of heavy footsteps running away, heard coming from the bus stop where his body was later found. What rendered this "suicide" even more dubious still was that it happened the same night that two hooded Ku Klux Klansmen were spotted nearby, in the unlikely suburbs of liberal San Francisco. The Klansmen had brutally attacked two other black man just blocks from where Lee's body was found. Tony Lamar Hall and Jeffrey Charles Miller were both stabbed, and their KKK attackers would later plead guilty. Timothy Lee's family was further distraught to learn not only that the mysterious strap which had been used to hang Timothy was destroyed by the coroner--an appalling and criminal act of evidence tampering--but the investigators who ruled it a suicide also chose to ignore the knife cuts that were clearly defensive wounds on Timothy's body.

Because most of you have probably heard of Matthew Shepard, but not of the 17 year old victim (minor, name withheld) of a Bronx gang who suffered a night of unimaginable terror: he was robbed, slashed repeatedly with a box cutter, and then sodomized for hours. Reported the New York Times, October 11th, 2012: “After he had been punched, kicked and stripped of his clothes and jewelry, the 17-year-old man was given a choice: the bat or the pipe. His attackers, part of a gang of nine young men, were in the midst of a night of savage assaults against three men they suspected of being gay ... Before the night was out, the victims would be tortured with burning cigarettes, box cutter blades, plunger handles and more, prosecutors charged. But first, the 17-year-old

had to make his selection. *'I guess the bat,'* he said."

Because many of you have no doubt heard the sad story of young Emmett Till, but you know nothing about the ongoing drama of Cequan Haskins--no, he was not brutally beaten, shot, and thrown into a river, as was fourteen year old Emmett. Instead, ten year old Cequan was punched, threatened, called names, forced to suck on his three hundred pound attacker's nipples, burned repeatedly--and as if all that is not horrific enough, for the duration of the attack, a grandmotherly appearing school bus driver egged on the perpetrators for three quarters of an hour, having multiple opportunities to intervene, but choosing not to. And the county in which it happened has absolutely no explanation for why they did absolutely nothing for the long months building up to this ugly incident. Multiple instances of bullying by the same two boys upon Cequan had been ongoing, but nobody did anything, in spite of Cequan's mother's constant pleas for intervention--until this particular forty minute attack was captured on video and ultimately went viral. Perhaps that is what finally needed to happen: the images needed to get out of Appomattox, a town where, demonstrably, nobody cares.

Yet still, the trial has come and gone, the grandmotherly school bus driver was found guilty of nothing, and those people to whom Cequan's mother repeatedly turned to for help--who knew that Cequan was being bullied--have yet to even address their own apathy, much less be held accountable. Cequan's mother still seeks justice. Perhaps the reason that this story is so near and dear to my heart is that it happened in my own home town, a place where you could not walk down Main Street, patronize the local McDonald's, or attend a friendly coffee klatch without hearing people cheerfully throwing the word "**nigger**" around for public consumption.

And if the tourists visiting Appomattox happened to overhear this, too bad for them.

If we are to understand the extent to which racial hatred still foments in America, we must start to pay attention again. And by that I mean, don't merely watch the news, question it. Question everything. The question that I asked myself over and over again during the writing of this book was "Why is there so damn little coverage of these contemporary lynchings, these shameful atrocities?"

Even during the time it took me to compile "The Little Book of Lynching", and its companion books, "Wigger" and "Liberty's Tyranny", the race debate has ratcheted up again, with the fate of poor Trayvon Martin and the fate of rich Paula Deen being played out on a national stage. (Granted, Trayvon's literal fate has been sealed; but whether or not he will be remembered as a neighborhood ne'er do well, or the tragic victim of an ill-conceived "Stand Your Ground" law, has yet to be determined--as has the final verdict on the actions and soul of the slippery, slimy George Zimmerman.)

Here is an example of how the modern American is comfortable with the short-circuiting of his or her own brain. For weeks after the famous Paula Deen imbroglio, self-aggrandizing bloggers and pundits who should have known better waxed on and on about this word she allegedly used some thirty years ago, many saying we should forgive her--on this point, I concurred; Lord knows I would not wish to be held accountable for things I did in the 80's. I danced to disco, for God's sake, and proudly.

But had anybody bothered to actually read the infamous Bubba Restaurant EEOC deposition, they would have heard Paula Deen calling a young girl, an under-aged waitress, "**a piece of pussy**", and not only calling her that, but corroborating it, almost proudly, under cross-examination--this act constituting an angry, ugly manifestation of misogynistic disrespect that I can't even properly articulate. And I can articulate a great deal. That, and Paula's own numerous veiled references to her contemporary racism within that same deposition should have changed the tenor of the national dialogue. But that would mean reading source material, (to wit, the actual text of the deposition), and it's oh so much easier to read People Magazine and TMZ. In point of fact, I bet avid readers of TMZ (not to be confused with the 60's DMZ) don't even know what those three letters mean. Again, curiosity is dead, and with it, the memory of those things we must never, ever forget if we are to prevent them from happening again.

And even when Paula Deen was exonerated, and the case thrown out of court, many people went for the simple explanation: that Ms. Jackson's case simply contained no merit. After all, why should a capable and sensitive young woman be offended at hearing Bubba say "**nigger**" whenever he had a snootful (which was apparently all day, every day); it's not like she was a black person or anything. Nobody, and not one journalist that I could find on the world wide web, asked the obvious question: just who was this judge that chose to quickly and summarily throw out the case?

As it turns out, he is Judge William T. Moore, one of the most notorious judges in history, because of one decision he made. It was a decision handed down from his bench that was probably tragic, and most certainly unjust. In September of 2011, the state of Georgia executed a man by the name of Troy Davis. But up till the moment of his death, his attorneys had been frantically trying to get him a new trial. Why? In the time that had passed, seven of the nine witnesses had recanted. Most of the witnesses were black, and finally felt safe coming forward and saying that the police had harassed, intimidated, and threatened them during that ugly August of 1989, in steamy Savannah, Georgia. (Small points: in the original trial, no weapon was ever recovered, and the accused had multiple witnesses to his alibi. He willingly turned himself in when he learned he was being sought for questioning, sure that his proclamation of innocence would lead to his exoneration. Ultimately, the jury deliberated for a mere two hours.)

And for those who still believe Davis was guilty, bear in mind: nobody wanted the

judge to declare the convicted man "Not Guilty," just grant him a new trial, as almost all of the witnesses had reversed their testimony. Oh--and another man had also confessed to the crime. That niggling detail might have influenced a different kind of judge, who takes seriously the reality of holding another man's life in his hands.

But Judge William T. Moore did not see the merit, and could not be bothered. Judge William T. Moore could not be bothered, even though the lawyers for the accused presented a petition signed by one million people. Judge William T. Moore could not be bothered, even though an international group, including Pope Benedict the XVI, the Reverend Desmond Tutu, Georgia's favorite son Jimmy Carter, Amnesty International, former U.S. Congressman from Georgia and presidential candidate Bob Barr, former F.B.I. Director and Judge William S. Sessions, and the NAACP all begged that the man who had been sitting in jail for two decades at least be granted a new trial, in light of the new circumstances and evidence.

But Judge William T. Moore said no. Said it was "all smoke and mirrors." And the execution went on as scheduled.

Not surprisingly, Troy Davis was a black man.

Anyone who had this information could have predicted how Judge William T. Moore would rule in the Paula Deen case. As for me personally, I think the judge should either resign and spend his days harmlessly golfing, or better still, be relegated to petty filings such as the famous one he opined formally upon, Matthew Washington's "Motion to the Court to Kiss My Ass." Moore gravely issued a judicial opinion on the motion. Oh, that he took the rest of his cases so seriously!

Why a book about contemporary lynching--you mean to tell me that lynching is still going on in America?

Because sure, we've all heard the name "Trayvon Martin", but how many of us know the name "Everett Gant"? Gant was a 32 year old family man who stopped by his neighbor's apartment to ask if his neighbor would please stop using racial epithets around the children in the building. By several accounts, Butler frequently called the kids in the apartment complex "**little niggers**", taunting and frightening them with assorted threats. Irked and rankled about having Gant interrupt his dinner, Walton Henry Butler promptly shot his neighbor between the eyes. He returned to eating his dinner, and when the police came a-knocking, Butler seemed unfazed. He casually referenced the "Stand Your Ground" law and commented that he "**only shot a nigger.**" The tragic victim, father of a beautiful little girl, died in the hospital six weeks later.

Because of the ongoing injustice that is the Kendrick Johnson case. This is a case in which investigators claim that a strong teenage athlete "accidentally suffocated" because he crawled inside a large, six foot rolled up gym mat to retrieve his sneakers. Even a

cursory look at Google Images of the crime scene (a high school gym) make it absurdly obvious that a broad shouldered young man like Kendrick could not have crawled into the gym mat, nor could he have suffocated, given the size of the opening just above his head.

GOOGLE IMAGES: KENDRICK JOHNSON CRIME SCENE

Investigators took their mint-julep sippin' sweet time, interviewing most of the involved parties--72 out of 111--**four months** after the death occurred, coincidentally, just when the world started to watch this investigation in the sleepy town of Valdosta, Georgia--a town made infamous a century earlier by the grisly lynching of Mary Turner and her unborn baby, along with some several dozen other innocent blacks whose names will never be known.

Four months before they bothered to ask the important questions. Not four hours, not four days, not four weeks, but four months. Among the witnesses they chose **not** to interview at all were the students last seen in the gym with Kendrick. Nor did they question the gym's janitor till long after the fact. They also never did bother to question the first paramedic on the scene, who saw the deceased Kendrick's face, the massive bruising, and just assumed it would be treated as a homicide.

Investigators chose to ignore the medical evidence that Kendrick died from blunt force trauma. They were unfazed by the fact that somebody destroyed his internal organs, which might have offered more proof of murder, and which lead the funeral home to do the unthinkable--stuffing poor Kendrick full of newspaper for the viewing. There are two different coroner reports from two different coroners, also unheard of, and the reports do not jive. Investigators also seemed untroubled by the fact that out of the nearly 300 hours of surveillance footage gathered by four cameras trained on the high school gym where the death happened, the only six hours mysteriously missing are those from when several white students followed Kendrick into the gym--a damning point proven by the fact that hallway cameras captured those images of Kendrick being followed into the gym, but it seems that whoever doctored the gym surveillance footage forgot about the evidence shot in the hallway.

Now, we must ask ourselves, in a land that touts "liberty and justice for all." Are we still a country of lynch mobs?

Why this book, "The Little Book of Lynching"?

Because lynchings which take place in the United States are truly America's Holocaust. Only it is a different kind of genocide than the kind we saw in Nazi Germany: it is not orchestrated, documented, and conducted in large and efficient killing factories, as was the Final Solution concocted by the Führer's inner circle. No, unlike "**die Endlösung der Judenfrage**," the eradication and emasculation (often, literally) of

American blacks is conducted in our country under cloak of darkness, and hood of anonymity. But that does not lessen nor mitigate the vastness of the numbers involved, nor the cruelty of the tortures perpetrated.

Last but certainly not least, let me answer the obvious question: Why the abrasive and WTF-ish title, "The Little Book of Lynching"? (Besides the obvious explanation that it comes right after my Appomattox diary, "The Little Book of Bigots" and right before my chapbook, "The Little Book of Anger.")

Well, the truth from my heart is this: the title is not meant to abrade. It is not meant to offend. Nor is it meant to diminish a subject I have chosen to spend two years of my life researching; the only thing diminutive about my writing is when I write about my miniature museum, where it makes perfect sense to wax diminutive--but that is a different subject, for another time.

The title of this book *is*, however, meant to be provocative, to make you think. And to get people talking. I will do whatever it takes to get people talking, once again, about the crisis of lynching in America.

Let me repeat myself: I will do whatever it takes to get people talking, once again, about the crisis of lynching in America.

Just as the nation talked at length about the death of Emmett Till ...about the shockingly tragic open casket funeral, and the infamous "Look Magazine" interview with the killers, in which they confessed all the grisly details of the murder. It was spellbinding: We the People watched and read and heard as two men sold their souls to the Devil, secure in the knowledge that that Double Jeopardy laws protected them from justice in this life.

And just as the nation talked in depth about the disappearance of three civil rights workers way down in Mississippi, and then talked with even more heated emotion when three bodies were found in a dam on Old Jolly Farm.

Just as the nation talked writ large about the slaughter of men like Harvey Milk, James Byrd, Matthew Shepard ...

All that having been said, as regards the title: the truth of it, you see, is that a book which contains only about two dozen lynchings, past and present, is indeed, quite specifically, quite precisely, a "Little Book of Lynching."

In order for it to be a comprehensive book of lynchings, it would have to be a very large and very thick book--in truth, not even that would begin to cover it.

If this were to be the true and full History of Lynchings in America, I am very sorry to tell you that it would have to be an encyclopedia. A set of encyclopedias.

And that grieves me more than I can begin to convey.

PART TWO

AMERICA'S GENOCIDE

“Never should have freed these buttweats” “Kill these stinking spooks!”

“We need to hunt down, lynch and hang these apes!”

“Ah, no crime in stringing people up in trees where I'm from. Burning crosses are a right of passage here! Come on down!”

“Wade tried to drag one behind his truck one night over at the old Gatsbys after he beat that spook half to death.”

“How can you tell if a nigger is well hung?”

... You can't fit your finger between the neck and the noose.”

CHAPTER TWO

THE LYNCHING OF HENRY SMITH:

*"For Civilized Citizens to Enjoy,
According to their individual relish ... "*

1893, February 1st. Paris, Texas

It is a carnival atmosphere. The children have all been let out of school today, by order of the mayor. Food vendors hawk their wares, and entire families are in attendance--mothers with their babies, kids playing, lovers holding hands, and fathers wanting their sons to witness this important rite of passage.

Folks have been traveling all night from nearby counties to join in the festivities. A grand cotton float has been built, with elaborate plans to parade it all through the town! It will all begin at the railroad depot, and after snaking through the streets, the float will make its last stop at the big county fair grounds.

There, the crowd, nearly 20,000 strong, will watch a man burn to death, after being tortured in the most hideous ways for nearly an hour, in what will come to be remembered as the most notorious spectacle of public lynching ever documented.

His name was Henry Smith, born a slave, and he made his living doing odd jobs around town. An anonymous soul, he could not know that he would become the victim of what many consider to be the most brutal lynching in American history. His crime: Smith was accused of the murder of three-year-old Myrtle Vance, the daughter of a policeman known for mistreating all those he arrested. (Although evidence would eventually point to Smith's guilt, there was no evidence that he committed all of the atrocities of which he was additionally accused.)

Officer Vance had quite a reputation, and was known for viciously beating prisoners both black and white, particularly if they made the mistake of crossing his path more than once. Smith was among those who had previously been cruelly beaten by Myrtle's father, after he had been arrested for drunkenness. Smith was a neighborhood handyman, and it was well known that he was extremely mentally disabled.

According to a *New York Times* article from Feb. 1, 1893, Smith allegedly: "*picked up little Myrtle Vance ... near her father's residence, and ... carried her through the*

central portion of the city... En route through the city, he was asked by several persons what he was doing with the child.” It was at that time, however, commonplace for negroes to attend the children of the white families for whom they worked, on errands or to school or to lessons, so little was thought of it, and the incident did not seem unusual.

After Myrtle’s body was found in the woods, it was assumed that Smith was the killer, Smith having been the last person seen with her alive. Smith, hearing that he was a suspect, fled to the town of Hope, Arkansas.

Literally thousands of men formed self-appointed posses and took off on horseback, scouring nearby towns, and even venturing across state lines, until Smith was found in Arkansas. He was then brought back by train, during which time a staggering 20,000 persons who had heard about the crime traveled through the night from nearby counties...

... And through the long wet night, to the ominous dirge of hammers nailing wood, a large scaffold was being built for the purpose of lynching Smith, who was not only to be tortured and hanged, but burned at the stake as well.

Fortunately for historians (unfortunately for those of us who feel the shame of being within the same species as these vigilantes--no, these monsters--who tortured Henry Smith) there exists an exhaustive eye-witness account available digitally through the Library of Congress. Here it is, excerpted for your consideration. Keep in mind, Policeman Vance had his twelve year old son participate in the burning torture of Henry Smith:

THE FACTS IN THE CASE
OF THE HORRIBLE MURDR
OF LITTLE MYRTLE VANCE
And its fearful expiation at Paris, Texas
February 1st, 1893
With Photographic Illustrations

Published for the benefit of the family of Henry Vance
Publish by P.L. Jams

(Here, I have excerpted that section of P.L. Jam’s account, beginning with when the posse got Smith back to Paris, Texas, through his horrific torture and execution. This one hundred and twenty year old book gives the reader a rare opportunity to read eyewitness accounts, celebratory accounts even, that give you a front row seat to the lynching of a fellow human being.)

Begin excerpt:

“Smith seemed indifferent about his fate at first, and could not be brought to understand the fearful vengeance to be wreaked upon him. When he was told and brought to realize by passengers on the train that his death was inevitable, and that he must die by the most cruel manner human ingenuity could devise, he weakened and begged the officers to save him. He asked to be spared his life and to be given any other punishment. This, he was told by the officers, would be done if possible, but passengers informed him it was impossible, as the people were determined to have his life.

He was asked how he preferred to die.

He answered that he wanted to be shot ...But Smith was informed that the mode of his death was already agreed upon. He must die at the stake.

When the train pulled up at the Texas and Pacific Depot, from 15,000 to 20,000 people were there to take charge of him, and every preparation had been made to receive him.

Smith was then taken to a wagon and placed in a chair on top of a box and firmly lashed to it. He was then driven to the public square and around it and through the principal streets and then to an open field near the Texas and Pacific Depot. Here a scaffold ten feet high had been erected. Around this there was a surging mass of humanity for nearly one hundred yards in every direction.

A cold, drizzling rain was idling that froze as it fell. The cowering shivering wretch, whose face was a picture of agony and terror, was taken from the wagon and forced up the steps, where he was pinioned to a stake. His coat and shirt were torn off him piece by piece and thrown among the crowd, where they were eagerly seized as relics.

When stripped to the waist, officer Henry Vance, who was the father of Smith's victim, his son and two uncles of the child, gathered around him.

They then began to thrust red-hot irons under his feet. Every contortion of his body and every groan that escaped his lips brought forth shouts of approval. Vainly he begged for mercy. The red-hot irons burned into his flesh deeper and deeper, and he uttered terrible cries. Cries that told of untold suffering.

Finally the irons were rolled up and down the stomach, back and arms. The crowd gazed on the terrible scene with a horrible fascination, as the slow process of torture proceeded.

The climax was reached when the irons were thrust into his eyes, burning the eyeballs away.

Then they were thrust into his throat, and still he lived and writhed and suffered.

When the relatives had glutted their vengeance, a great mass of combustible material was placed under the scaffold, oil was poured over Smith, the platform and the fuel and

the match applied. For a time he was enveloped in a dense volume of smoke. As this passed away and the flames shot, the coward Smith was seen amid the fire, swaying back and forth. In a little while he became still and all thought him dead. The fire burned the ropes that bound him and he fell upon the burning platform.

Then he began to toss and roll about as the flames rolled and hissed around him! It seemed impossible that anything could have lived for a moment in what was almost a furnace. His pants were burned entirely away and the flesh on his body seemed cooked to a crisp, and his feet and hands were burned to a coal.

After a lapse of ten minutes, to the surprise of all, with a desperate struggle he pulled himself up by the railing of the burning scaffold, stood up erect, passed his hands over his face and then jumped off the scaffold and rolled out of the fire below. Men on the ground thrust him into the burning mass. Again he rolled out and was again thrust in, to roll out again!

A rope was tied around his neck and he was dragged in and held in, until life was finally extinct, and the process of burning went on until his body was literally cremated.

It was one of the most horrible deaths ever suffered by a human being. Hundreds turned away in horror at the awful spectacle, while thousands gazed on with evident satisfaction and many with demonstrations of delight.

There were so many incidents of the affair that they can never all be written or told, although it burned and seared itself into every mind so vividly that it stands out before all who gazed upon it as vividly now as when they witnessed it.

Today relic hunters visited the spot and raked the ashes of his funeral pyre for souvenirs. Pieces of his bones were found and taken away. One man got a knee cap and made a watch charm of it. A Negro got a portion of rib bone and carried it home, placing it over his door for good luck.”

Here ends the excerpt.

Two days later, they also lynched Smith’s step-son, because they thought he might possibly have lied about the whereabouts of his step-father.

Keep in mind that Henry Smith, this poor torture victim, whose “confession” came out of fear and duress, and whom the town had generally agreed was mentally disabled to begin with, was never even allowed to stand trial.

He was only allowed to suffer the truest pains of hell, to atone for what he might have done.

And lest any of us be too quick to judge the citizens of Paris, Texas, make no mistake--the bloodlust to witness a lynching spread across the United States like wildfire. While many Americans were of course horrified by the news of this gruesome and torturous death by fire, there were tens of thousands who flocked to experience every bit of it that they could, even if it be only in a vicarious manner.

And it was a riveting way to celebrate a brand new invention. A few months after the Henry Smith lynching, a black man by the name of Samuel Burdett was in a place far, far north of Paris, Texas. Specifically, he was whiling away the time in Seattle, Washington--and he came upon a crowd of folks obviously enjoying some kind of public amusement or entertainment.

Intrigued, he approached the group, making his way to the front row, where a gentleman was fascinating the crowd with his demonstration. And sure enough, it was the newest technology on display, the novelty of 1893--a gramophone! The public display that Samuel Burdett was about to witness in its entirety was billed as an exhibit "*for civilized citizens to enjoy according to their individual relish for the awful-for the horrible!*"

Jacqueline Goldsby, in her book *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature*, tells of Burdett's horror at the fact that the entire nation seemed interested in these sadistic small town lynchings:

"Burdett recounted with anguish the series of 'photographic views, coupled with phonographic records of the utterances of a negro who had been burned to death in Paris, Texas, a short time before.' In chronological display, offered on a series of easels in front of the crowd, were photographs that recounted the lynching in its entirety, from the discovery of Myrtle Vance's corpse to the capture, torture, and cremation of Henry Smith.

Adjacent to these images was a gramophone with several listening devices--what we would today recognize as headsets. As its disc plate spun, listeners could hear a recording of the confrontation between Myrtle Vance's father and the child's alleged assailant...

...Like the others who were there on that street corner in Seattle, Burdett took up the tubes of the phonographic instrument and placed them to his ears.

What Burdett then saw and heard profoundly unnerved him; gripped by guilt nearly a decade later, he described the moment: '*Oh, horror of horrors! Just to hear that poor human being scream and groan and beg for his life, in the presence and hearing of thousands of people, who had gathered from all parts of the country about to see it.*' ...as his prose also demonstrates, it is unclear who horrifies Burdett more: the mob that watched the murder in Paris, Texas, or the entranced audience of onlookers in Seattle?"

Here ends the Goldsby excerpt.

And for those who were not able to find such a public spectacle as the demonstration of the exciting new gramophone, there were postcards. During the late 1800's, and up until 1908, tens of thousands of graphic postcards of lynchings moved through the United States Postal Service, until they found their way into the hands of the curious, the cruel, and the collectors. Avid collectors. The ghastly images of the dying and the dead, some charred beyond recognition, moved as easily, as casually through the mail, as postcards of the Grand Canyon or Yellowstone Park or Niagara Falls, until they were finally banned by the government.

Google Images: Lynching Postcards

These postcards became known in many circles as “trophy cards”, because even more horrific than the lynched bodies were the gleeful faces of the men and women in the pictures, standing proudly by the “beast” they had hunted, cornered, and killed. Even children look on proudly, participating in this rite of passage, their innocence lost forever.

“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things.”

1 Corinthians, 13:11

CHAPTER THREE

A LEGACY OF LYNCHINGS: WHICH TO CHOOSE

“Niggers love to throw the word 'lynch' around. They act like they were the only species lynched. And they also act like niggers were lynched for no reason. 99% of the damn time they deserved it. So did all the white people who got lynched back in the day. I'm pro-lynching. It saved the country a lot of money in the old days. Course back then even the tame niggers wanted a criminal nigger to get lynched. But you'll never hear a nigger mention that today.”

[-FORUM POSTER IN CHIMPOUT.COM](#)

So there ends the tragic murder of Henry Smith. But of the thousands of lynchings which have taken place in our proud and just United States of America, one might well ask, *why begin with that particular lynching?*

I selected it because, as any scholar of American lynchings will tell you, it is considered one of the most horrific and notorious, for two reasons: firstly, because the accused was not afforded a trial of any kind. And secondly, because this went far beyond the mob wanting him dead for his alleged crimes. They wanted him tortured, they wanted him tortured for a very long time, and thousands were prepared to watch--and relish--that torture.

But how to go about choosing subsequent examples, from the thousands? Which other lynchings to examine as a part of the South's grim legacy ... for we have already seen that certain criteria are required for a hate crime to occur, **and** that those elements still lurk in parts of America's South today. (My friends are always correcting me, however, that it is not only America's southern regions who must own the tragic history of lynchings. Ironically, today, June 15th, is the tragic anniversary of the Duluth lynchings. Pockets of prejudice intense enough to provoke hate crimes invade every part of this country. But certainly, sadly, the vast majority of them took place in America's South.)

When selecting which lynchings to describe and remember, so that we might learn the lessons of history, there are so many horrific categories to choose from:

There are the ones rendered particularly shameful because, as in the case of Henry Smith, the accused did not receive a trial--for there are two kinds of mob vengeance. There is the kind of murder in which the mob hears that someone is possibly guilty, hunts down him or her, and kills them without giving the accused their right to a trial.

And then there are those who know that a soul has been convicted in a court of law (however obviously crooked the trial may have been), and then the mob, unable to wait for the lawful sentence to be carried out, breaks into the jail and lynches the prisoner.

Sadly, there are seemingly countless examples of that first category of lynchings, in which the victims never even got their day in court: Henry Argo, Mack Charles Parker, Willie Earl, Dan Davis, Mose Jones, Johnny Cornish, McKinley Curry, Anthony Crawford, to name only a few.

(Regarding that last phrase, "to name only a few": while we know for a fact that thousands of lynchings have taken place in this country since 1882, when the Chicago Tribune first began keeping meticulous count, we cannot even begin to know the true numbers, which are undoubtedly much, much higher. A decade later, in 1892, the Tuskegee Institute would begin keeping its own records, followed by the NAACP in 1912. Figures generally approach 5000, and, as if this is not bad enough, it does not include all of the lynchings which transpired prior to that time, from the very early years of this country's history, through a dozen generations, until 1882. There are a few horribly graphic accounts from the 1600's, for example, even beyond the well publicized Salem witch trials. Nor does that include the "lynchings" of black slaves by disgruntled slave owners; most of these would never have been recorded, certainly not in any place of public record. Nor does this include the fact that thousands of blacks in the old South simply "went missing", and the black community knew that it was pointless to go to authorities, especially because, in many instances, the local sheriff and deputies were also loyal members of the KKK. We will simply never know the numbers.)

Then there is the entire category of lynchings in which a man wasn't just put to death by hanging, but was also tortured with fire. (The entire matter of hanging as a means of execution is a peculiar one. Done properly, it is actually considered one of the most humane. When hanging was/is used as a method of execution by a government--a "civilized" government, that is--a complex preparation involving calculations which include the weight of the prisoner, the length of the rope, and the specifications of the rope itself are used to insure, upon the drop, a "rapid fracture dislocation of the neck." [This from an Army manual entitled, "The Corrections Professional"] Needless to say, mob lynchings were not nearly so calculated nor humane, so the poor victim usually died by slow and agonizing strangulation.)

But, as I have just noted, sometimes the slow torture of strangulation is not even enough for the bloodthirsty mob. Sometimes burning at the stake, or by other methods, is added to the horror. Among those tortured by fire: Jessie Washington, Henry Smith, Mary

Turner, Johnny Cornish, Mose Jones, McKinley Curry, Zachariah Walker, Same Hose, Luther Holbert and his wife, and John the Slave, to name only a few.

Then there is the heartbreaking category of women and children. Yes, horrifically enough, children have been tortured and killed by mobs, in larger numbers than one might expect. A partial list would include eighteen year old Abraham Smith, eighteen year old Owen Anderson (lynched for no other reason but that a girl said he frightened her while she was walking on the sidewalk), seventeen year old Jesse Washington (who was known to be mentally retarded), seventeen year old Marie Scott (because she reported being assaulted by a gang of white males), sixteen year old James Cameron, fifteen year old Lawrence Nelson, and perhaps one of the most famous child victims, fourteen year old Emmett Till*, whose death it is generally agreed marked the beginning of the modern civil rights movement. And of course, there are the four little girls killed in the basement of a church in the famous Birmingham church bombing--their only crime? Attending a Sunday school lesson themed "The Love That Forgives" at a church that the Reverend Martin Luther King was using for civil rights meetings. Only a week before the bombing, Governor George Wallace had told The New York Times that to stop integration, Alabama needed "a few first-class funerals." The Governor obviously got his wish.

(* Regarding Emmett Till, whose story is included in this book's sad anthology of victims: The beginning of the modern civil rights movement constitutes something of a Catch 22. Many would say that the era of modern civil rights actually began with the famous Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, the irony being that massive Southern revulsion towards this decision was no doubt part of what prompted lynchings like the death of Emmett Till. Yet it was the very public funeral of Emmett Till which finally forced the nation to literally see the face of lynching in America, and to "choose sides" as it were, thereby galvanizing the movement in a profoundly human way that a federal ruling simply could not.)

Women who were tortured and killed in America's old South would include Laura Nelson (mother of fifteen year old Lawrence), Mary Turner, Maggie and Alma Hawze, both pregnant. Eula and Ella Barber were lynched in front of their brother and father, both of whom were then also lynched. Other famous cases include Jennie Steers, Cordella Stevenson, Rosa Richardson, Meta Hicks, Marie Scott, Balli Crutchfield, Laura Wood, Mercy Hall Holly White, Sally Brown, Lily Cobb, Mary Conley, Bertha Lowman, Maria Smith, Angenora Spencer, Mrs. Frank Clay, Mae Dorsey, Dorothy Malcolm, Mrs. John Simes, Mrs. James Ayers, Mrs. Hawkins, Mrs. Ben French, Mrs. Wise--I could go on and on. Many of these women were lynched for "crimes" as petty as minor theft, being part of a picket line, swearing out a warrant against a white man, being able to identify a white man suspected of a crime, or simply knowing another black who may or

may not have committed a crime. Again, the list is long, and ultimately never can be completed.

Then, there is the category of ethnics who prove the point that blacks were not the only “Others” that the Klan, white supremacists, and other hate mongers sought to torture, punish and destroy. There are the famous lynchings of Leo Frank, a Jewish merchant, Antonio Rodriguez, a humble Mexican carpenter, Josepha, a Latina woman alone in America’s new west, and Katsu Goto, a Japanese man who made the mistake of being a better businessman than his white competitors.

Then, there is the appalling category of lynchings that led not just to the death of one person, but to the destruction of entire towns. There was the lynching of a Chinese gentleman that led to the razing of the entire Denver Chinatown district in 1880, and of course, many are familiar with Rosewood, Florida--an entire town burned to the ground because of the act of one man. These are just two examples of entire neighborhoods or towns being leveled because of something that one person did. Or did not.

And, as a sort of apologia to the American South for what appears to be my indictment of its soul, there is the category of lynchings that took place anywhere but the South. Frank McManus of Minnesota, James T. Scott of Missouri, Cleo Wright of Missouri, Henry Argo of Oklahoma, and Samuel Johnson of New Jersey, to name just a few, and of course there were the lynchings of Elias Clayton, Elmer Jackson, and Isaac McGhie, carried out in the northerly state of Minnesota. In the case of this famous 1920 triple lynching, there was virtually no credible evidence that any of these three black men had committed a crime, unless you call being part of a traveling circus troupe a crime.

There is even the category of whites hanging their own. Abolitionists in general, and the 1964 murder of three civil rights workers in particular come to mind, but the one which haunts me most is the murder of little Thomas Hellier, a mentally ill fourteen year old white boy. Not only was Thomas hanged after being merely accused of murder, but to add insult to injury, he then had his body lashed to a tree and purposely never removed for years, as it was slowly reduced to a mere skeleton of a child ... as other boys and girls passed by every day, for hundreds of days, to witness the terror that evil adults could and would perpetrate on children who “misbehaved.”

Lastly, one could choose to review lynchings which might be on some kind of top ten list for ghoulish details. Surely the aforementioned lynching and lashing of a child to a tree would be one such grisly example.

When Luther Holbert and his wife were tortured and burned together in Mississippi, for an alleged crime never proven in any trial, not only was a corkscrew used to pierce their skin and draw out long bits of flesh, which were then distributed among the excited spectators, but eyewitness accounts speak of a cheerful and refined crowd who might have been attending a country picnic: according to an article in the Vicksburg Evening Post, February 8th, 1904, the white folks were “**fortified by deviled eggs, lemonade, and**

whiskey” , as they watched the Holberts being tortured and roasted to death.

Obviously bored with traditional lynching, one particularly bloodthirsty mob, in Pinehurst Georgia, June 1912, decided to go after Ann Barksdale, a negro accused of killing her employer, although there was no proof and no trial. Their amusement came from placing her in a car with a rope around her neck, while the other end of the rope was tied around a tree limb. That’s when the driver hit the gas, speeding away until her screaming was stopped by her strangulation. For good measure, the mob shot her eyes out and shot enough bullets into her body that she was “cut in two.”

In the case of Same Hose, his knuckles showed up later in the window of a local butcher shop, a prize trophy from the lynching.

In the case of Laura Nelson, after the mob lynched both her and her son, one of the mob cut off her fingers and ears, placed them in a jar of alcohol, and placed them on proud display in the front window of a house in town.

And, as we have seen, in the case of Henry Smith, the audio-visual details of his agonizing death were used as a beguiling sales demonstration for the new-fangled gramophone. Sheesh, they couldn’t use images of the world’s fair or a zeppelin?

And of course, castration almost always attended the lynching of a black male.

No, wait--did I say lastly? I have one more category, that I could have chosen from, for the chapters that follow herein:

We must surely include the chilling category of **current lynchings**, keeping in mind that the term “lynching” has expanded over the years to include not just extra-judicial hangings, but any hate-crime oriented murder of a person who has not been allowed access to our judicial system.

... And yet more evidence that modern “lynchings” are no less cruel and twisted than those of a century ago:

The town is Joliet, Illinois, the subject of so many songs, stories, and prison lore. The four young suspects, eighteen year old Alisa Massaro, eighteen year old Bethany McKee, nineteen year old Adam Landerman (his mother is a Joliet police sergeant), and twenty four year old Joshua Miner, were all charged with, and later admitted to, the gruesome killings of “best friends” Eric Glover and Terrence Rankin, both twenty-two years of age, and both Afro-Americans. ***“The corpses elicited a 'zombie noise' - a final gasping sound. The bodies also evacuated their bowels, Miner claimed.”*** Then, the four teens enjoyed necrophiliac sex (a fantasy of one of the girls), on the bodies of the dead black boys--a new twist in hate crimes.

They then headed to Walgreen’s for soda and beef jerky. McKee revealed ***“they were***

going to cut up the bodies and they were going to cut the fingers, hands, and the arms off of each of them.” She also told officers that Miner **“wanted to keep the teeth of both deceased as trophies from killing them after they had cut up the bodies,”** a report said. When the cops came calling, the four teens were doing what they had been doing for two days, before and after the murder--playing video games. They seemed startled to see the police at their door.

They never got to carry out their plan to cut up the bodies, according to investigators, because McKee's father, William McKee, phoned police after his daughter asked him for help getting rid of the bodies.

Of all the suspects, Miner has the most extensive criminal record, according to the Sun-Times. Three years ago, he was also convicted of a residential burglary and was ordered into a state boot camp program. He has also previously pleaded guilty to videotaping child pornography.

My personal observation: their mug shots feature the four deadest pairs of eyes I have ever seen. They have clearly sold their souls.

It would seem that disasters provide yet another new excuse, and another new venue, for white-on-black lynchings. There was a time when it seemed that people were at their best during disasters, be it a community crisis (I am thinking of my being in the Northridge 6.6 Earthquake, woohoo, what a ride), or a regional disaster like El Derecho (also an adventure I will never forget), or even cataclysmic events with national and international implications--tsunamis, nuclear meltdowns, etcetera.

But for racists, it is just another excuse to go hunting. David Neiwer in crooksandliars.com and A.C. Thompson in “The Nation” have both penned alarming articles about the surge of a lynch mob mentality which took place after Katrina. It would seem that in the neighborhood of Algiers Point, rather than making sure emergency supplies and rescue vehicles could get through to those in need, riled whites instead dragged trees and wreckage **out into the road**, (when everybody else was doing just the opposite), so that all neighborhood entrances would be blocked--as in, so blacks could not make their way in. Set aside for a moment the fact that no ambulance could get to a sick or wounded person, and no food or water could get to the starving and the dying--even the white folks who were suffering. To hell with them. To hell with them all.

Several dozen white residents created a communal stockpile of their handguns, rifles, ammo, at least one Uzi--and then they began patrolling, looking for anyone (can you say Trayvon Martin?) **“who didn’t belong”**, to use one hunter’s own words. **“Three people got shot in just one day,”** bragged Wayne Janak, a creepily proud sixty year old contractor. **“Three of them got hit right here in this intersection with a riot gun,”**

boasted Janak to a reporter, and then Janak goes on to explain that because the victims were sporting sneakers and baseball caps, surely they must be looters. ***“We unloaded a riot gun”*** --an actual shotgun, he explained when pressed-- ***“and chased them down.”*** Then Janak decided to let one of them live, with the admonition that he scurry back to his neighborhood with a message about what would happen to blacks if they ventured into this neighborhood again. ***“Go back to your neighborhood so people will know Algiers Point is not a place you go for a vacation. We’re not doing tours right now.”***

And when a documentary crew came in to film a piece on Katrina, Janak was not shy about committing his murderous felonies to celluloid for all time. Hoisting a beer, while enjoying a celebratory barbecue, Janak crowed, ***“It was great! It was like pheasant season in South Dakota. If it moved, you shot it!”*** A native of Chicago, Janak also boasts of becoming a true Southerner, saying, ***“I am no longer a Yankee. I earned my wings.”*** A white woman standing next to him adds, ***“He understands the N-word now.”*** In this neighborhood, she continues, ***“We take care of our own.”***

Another woman, who spoke to the reporter under the condition of anonymity, for fear her relatives would be prosecuted, said, ***“My uncle was very excited that it was a free-for-all, white against black, that he could participate in,”*** says the woman. ***“For him, the opportunity to hunt black people was a joy.”***

Janak, along with all of his pan blanco peeps, are real pieces of work. Janak is very proud of the bloody shirt he took from one of his dead victims, and is eager to show it off to anyone who seems even vaguely interested. He proudly announces, as he displays the trophy, ***“You know what? Algiers Point is not a pussy community.”***

(Your humble author would have to agree. In my experience, people sporting a pussy are usually far, far kinder than this.)

The new black lynchings also include Latino gangs whose *raison d’être* (or perhaps French does not work here; I should have written “razón de ser”) includes primarily the trafficking of drugs and the slaughtering of blacks, even though in many cases, the blacks who are gunned down have absolutely nothing to do with gangs or drugs. Case in point: as recently as January of 2013, no less than fifty-one Latino gang members in Azusa, California (a suburb of Los Angeles) were arrested, charged, tried, and sentenced for what essentially amounted to a genocide policy assigned to the Azusa 13 Gang by the Mexican Mafia Prison Gang.

The gang members would assault any blacks that they spotted, and then spray paint racist graffiti as a kind of signature. (This is covered in more depth in my upcoming book, ***“The Little Book of Anger.”***) It came out during the trial that this genocidal policy has been in place since 1992, over twenty years now, and it explains the ongoing killing

of innocent blacks: a high school football star, an elderly janitor for a bowling alley, and a forty-nine year old woman who was shot as she was standing outside her apartment and saying goodnight to a friend. The killings saw a significant spike in 1999 and 2000, when a wave of gang members was released from prisons onto the streets.

And what is my favorite part? The orchestrated genocide was not just limited to Azusa; the Mexican Mafia has also instituted the genocide policy in other Los Angeles neighborhoods such as Hawaiian Gardens, San Bernardino, the Florence-Firestone district, Pacoima, Glassell Park, Highland Park, and Canoga Park--none of these places having the “parky” feel that you might expect from the misleading moniker.

Remember that house I told you I couldn’t sell, the one that plummeted from a comp value of \$800,000 to \$200,000 in a couple of years? That house, my home, was situated in the Mexican Mafia targeted neighborhood of Canoga Park. Once a charming middle and upper middle class neighborhood of jovially mixed ethnicities, it changed radically during the years that I lived there. Near the end of my time there, it was not unusual to see graffiti as tall as me reading CPANK, a not-so-secret acronym for Canoga Park Alabama Gang Nigger Killers. And with my then hometown being only 3.7 square miles, there was a good chance near the end there that you would dodge a bullet walking your dogs. I know that a young girl was dumped naked in the alley where I walked my dogs nightly, the act having been carried out as part of a gang initiation.

Now, you can see why nobody wanted to buy a house in my neighborhood anymore.

And the above crimes are just some of the more publicized modern lynchings; also we must note the questionable “suicides” of a seemingly endless list of Afro-American men, the following being just a few:

Just miles from the site of Emmett Till’s brutal murder (this young boy’s lynching being one of the most notorious in our nation’s history), another young black man was found hanging from a tree. But instead of 1955, the year was 2010. Authorities labeled it suicide. But local blacks, the NAACP, and most persons gifted with a sense of reason, all strenuously disagreed. And they still do, four years later. Frederick Jermaine Carter of Greenwood, Mississippi, “wandered off” from a job that he was working with his stepfather, after his stepfather left to get some tools. And then he hanged himself from the high branch of a tall tree.

There remain questions which are more than nagging, they are torturous for the family. To cite just a few: if a piece of rope that was found at the crime scene matched the rope around Frederick’s neck, both being recently cut, why was a cutting device not found on the victim or the crime scene? Why was the weather-worn top of an outdoor table that this 5’4” boy allegedly used to reach an eight foot high branch not taken into

evidence? And why was the table not tested in a lab, to see if it could have been used to climb up on? Could it have withstood the boy's weight? Or was it too damaged to have been used for a young man to hang himself--as in, was it just left there as a "prop"? Why is it the coroner stated that the body had been dead for twenty-four hours, but the property owners who had traversed that very area earlier had not seen a body hanging from a tree that morning; it was found at noon.

Did the killers murder Frederick elsewhere, a location which was more private, then move the body, for public display? Why hasn't the Nation of Islam received the second autopsy which they paid for, and which they have a right to read under the Freedom of Information Act? What happened to Frederick's wallet? Why were his clothes completely neat, shirt tucked in, with absolutely no tree residue on his body or under his medium length fingernails, if he had to climb the tree to hang himself?

Why was the site of Frederick's hanging never cordoned off as a crime, or even an accident scene? Some claimed to have seen footsteps along with those belonging to Frederick, but with the sheriff's and deputies' footsteps subsequently trampling the site, proof or analysis became virtually impossible--especially for the highly unmotivated.

Witnesses at the funeral home said that there were notable bruises and scratches on Frederick Jermaine Carter's body, while the law authorities disagree with that assessment.

And one last chilling detail: according to Wendol Lee, of Operation Help Civil Rights Group, ***"If you stand (Carter) up on the table, he still can't even reach the tree."***

Why was this investigation so bungled?

Why, indeed. Emmett Till, is your young ghost listening?

But this list of modern lynchings--or, "suicides" as some have classified them--is by no means short; it numbers in the hundreds, the following being just a few of the most blatantly bungled, in terms of police investigation:

--Raynard Johnson, 19, of Kokomo, Mississippi. Date of death: June 16th, 2000. Raynard was dating a white woman at the time he "committed suicide" and was hanged with a belt that did not belong to him. He was found hanging from a low branch, but with his feet on the ground. Suicide? Really? The night before the murder, a truck with only the parking lights on was seen passing by his house several times. Days later, the crowd that marched six miles in 100 degree heat, in a plea for re-opening the investigation, walked over a sign on the bridge that had been spray painted to read, ***"Death To All Niggers."*** And by the way, nobody ever checked the mysterious belt for DNA.

--Izell Parrott, 58 year old barbecue king of Glens Falls, New York. Body found: May 17, 2006. Izell's badly decomposed body was found only after the man had been missing for over a year. "Izzie" had disappeared after being openly harassed at a picnic for his involvements with white women. Around that time, he also told a friend that he had found the letters "KKK" carved into a tree in his back yard.

Apparently, it roused no suspicion that this 58 year old overweight man was found hanging thirty-five feet up in the trees, something which would have been virtually impossible for him to do on his own. Police also did not find it suspicious that there was no credit card activity on his accounts from the day he disappeared, and for the subsequent months that he was reported by his family in North Carolina as a missing person. Nor did they find it odd that he left all of his valuable cooking equipment behind, out in the open, in the vacant lot where he cooked for his barbecue patrons.

Nor did police bother to pursue the lead of James Dallas, a heavily tattooed white man who boasts he can bench press 335 pounds, and who has bragged of public altercations with “Izzie” over white women. Dallas was accused of killing another man in similar fashion two years earlier, and has had--wait for it--no less than forty-five warrants sworn out on him in twelve years, one of which resulted in a felony assault conviction.

As is the case in so many of these stories, it is hard to find decent coverage of this police investigation, but I stumbled upon a sad forum thread on barbecuebible.com about “Izzie”. (Yet ultimately, it is more creepy than sad.) Barbecue aficionados were mourning the fact that his mobile barbecue stand had been abandoned for months; in response, someone posted with a helpful update that “police had talked to relatives there [North Carolina] who had been in contact with him shortly after he arrived.” Now, ask yourself--who is more likely to be lying about this? The local cops, in an area where KKK carvings have been found? Or the frantic relatives who had been worried sick about Izzie, and reported him as a missing person? I'm thinking the cops.

--Lamar Autery, 42 years old, of Hudson, New York. Date of death: October 9th, 1983. Lamar was found hanging from a very small tree in the city of Hudson, New York. “His” belt that he used to hang himself was two and a half times the size of his waist. Police ignored the fact that a witness claims to have seen the Hudson Chief of Police holding a gun to Lamar’s head earlier in the week, and that other witnesses had seen him being forced into a car outside of a local club on the night of his murder, that car then speeding off towards the waterfront, where Lamar’s body was found later that night.

The medical examiner who pronounced the death a suicide was not a even medical doctor. Three separate witnesses who saw the crime scene said that the tree was not tall enough or strong enough to hold a man in a hanging suicide. Lamar follows a trail of many black men in the tiny town of Hudson who have “committed suicide by hanging.”

What is also a matter of alarm is that while the white policemen allegedly seen by witnesses in altercation with Lamar were never questioned or detained, of those several men, these are the facts: Officer Duffy was eventually kicked off the force and sent to prison on other charges, Chief of Police James Dolan was indicted for other crimes and thrown off the force, while Officer Frank Abitabile, who was caught up in a prostitution sting, was witnessed beating up a woman in an alley, and was also later witnessed dislocating a biracial child’s shoulder. His career ended over the sting.

Michael Elliot Moore, a long time friend of Lamar, is still campaigning for justice now, almost thirty years later, and has received numerous death threats all during that time. When he went into the police station, just months after the murder, seeking copies of the coroner's report, along with all other pertinent papers and photos, he was told that the files no longer existed. He was punched in the back and told that he was "an island, alone in the town," and to "watch his back."

--Nick Naylor, 23 years old, of Meridian, Mississippi. Disappeared January 8th, body found January 9th, 2003. Nick disappeared while on his dusk routine of walking his dog. With no apparent reason to kill himself, he was found hanging from a sapling by his dog's leash, behind an all-white deer hunting compound. Although his family searched frantically after he failed to come home that night, and began again at dawn, they did not find him, but were told by the hunters to "***Get out of here, you're scaring the deer,***" and "***Maybe he caught the early morning train,***" which is Dixie lingo for a lynching.

The chain was double wrapped around two low branches in a way that would appear impossible for someone attempting suicide to achieve, and he was hanged from a sapling which could not possibly have held his weight, in suicide hanging fashion. The crime scene was not cordoned off, and although Nick's family was held at bay, the deer hunters were allowed to roam freely.

Numerous unidentified (because investigators didn't try?) fingerprints were found on the suicide note, but Nick's were nowhere on the paper. The handwriting did not match Nick's at all.

And again, as is so often the case, there exists not a single local original source story, be it television or print, on the web, save for one five sentence news story coming out of Meridian, Mississippi--oh wait. That's the same county where, in 1964, the entire sheriff's department, along with several dozen other Klansmen, conspired to kill three civil rights worker--and then the state itself refused to prosecute the killers for murder. Now I understand why no local news story bothered to archive this story.

--Johnny Clark of Dover, Delaware, 19 years old, freshman at Wesley College. Date of death: May 12th, 2012. His death was ruled suicide by hanging, even though another young black man, college freshman and football standout Charles Conley, had "committed suicide" in the same Silver Lake Park location two years earlier in the same manner, and also notwithstanding the fact that a third black man survived an attempted lynching just a few months after the supposed suicide of Johnny, but lived to tell about it. This man who nearly became a third "suicide victim" showed police the presence of beating marks, and stab wounds at the back of his neck.

Pamphlets showing a lynching, a swastika, and the phrase "***Cleaning Up the Streets, One Nigger at a Time***" had also been found in the area during the months between the first two murders. Police also conveniently ignored the information given to them by the third man, the survivor, Henry Fordham, who told the police that the two men who had

tried to lynch him were actually white neighbors from the same block where he lived. Nor did they pay attention to the fact that these two men were the same two neighbors who were also identified by Johnny Clark's brother as being seen with Johnny on the same day that Johnny "killed himself". All three of the men were together in a truck, James Byrd style. Nor were the police interested in the fact that both of these men fled their homes on the same day of the unsuccessful attack on Fordham.

--Feraris Golden, 32 years old, of Belle Glade, Florida, a town know for its racial tension. Date of death: May 28th, 2003. Feraris "Ray" Golden had been dating the daughter of a white policeman, and although he had "hanged himself" from a tree on a very rainy night, there was no mud on his shoes. Also disturbing is the fact that the responding officers drove their squad car right over the crime scene, up to the tree, as soon as they arrived, not only contaminating a potential crime scene, but effectively announcing, to a town already rife with racial tensions, that they really just don't give a damn.

Dan Paige, an attorney representing the boy's family and the local NAACP, said it best, regarding the controversy: ***"It shouldn't be a question of whether it was a suicide or a lynching. It should be a question of whether there's enough questions here to do a murder investigation."*** (What also hampers an online investigation such as my own is that my computer's stupid auto correct just keeps assuming that I am not looking for information about Feraris Golden, but Golden Ferraris, and hence keeps showing me shiny pictures of sport cars, instead of photographs of the crime scene. Crud.)

UPDATE: Just found on highbeam.com: Four years after the supposed "suicide" of Feraris, on July 15, 2007, his neighbor was found hanging from a tree about 120 yards away. This time the noose was not a rope or belt, but the chain from the hanging man's own front porch swing. But this was not a black man who had "committed suicide", this was nobody less than former Police Chief Louis Lowery.

What is extremely bizarre is that it was Louis's daughter whom Feraris had been dating. Even more bizarre still is that there is virtually no coverage of this bizarre synchronicity on the web. But increasingly, I am not surprised. Because that is the way of it in many small towns: if local papers cover it as minimally as they can get away with, then dump the archives, it never leaks out to the world.

Perhaps, some day, the internet will change all of that. A kind of abolitionist-spring, like the Arab spring. For are not the lynchings of today as much the purview and passion of modern abolitionists as was slavery in days gone by?

So, what happened to Police Chief Louis Lowery, anyway, with this coincidental "suicide"? Was it a true suicide, wrought out of guilt at the end of a man's life--a man who may have participated in the lynching of another human being? Or was he ready to confess all, then silenced before he could. I suspect we will never know.

-- Keith Warren, 19 years old, of Silver Spring, Maryland. Body found: July 31st,

1986. Keith was just a few weeks away from enrolling in North Carolina Central University at Durham, and by all accounts, supercharged about the future that was waiting in store for him. And yes, he lived in a predominantly white neighborhood, and had dated some white girls.

Suicide? Where to start? With the fact that the first person on the scene, an experienced paramedic, looked at the crime scene and examined the body and stated (later swore in writing) that it could not have been a suicide, yet his report was disregarded by all others involved in the investigation? With the fact that the first officer on the scene waited five and a half hours to inform the family, even though he had their contact information?

Even worse, that same officer and his colleagues never bothered to cordon off the crime scene. Even worse, that same officer chose a funeral home for the body and sent it there immediately, rather than letting the family do so. Even worse, he had the body embalmed before an autopsy could even be performed, an unbelievably extreme violation of protocol for which he was never held accountable. Even worse, the tree from which Keith had supposedly hanged himself was chopped down because this was the investigation's way of "preserving the evidence"?

(Dear reader, are you beginning to understand why those who track modern lynchings, or "suicides" as they are so often called, tend to walk around in a fog of fury and disbelief? This story, in particular, astonished me and my colleagues because Silver Spring, Maryland is no backwoods Deliverance hamlet in the hills: it is a wealthy, progressive, and educated community just minutes from the most powerful and affluent corridors of Washington, D.C.. I went to school just down the road--in fact, I was at University of Maryland working on my Doctorate the year this happened. And I don't remember reading about it in the paper.)

But back to Keith's suicide. The story takes an even more sinister twist, although it would be hard to imagine what that might be: six years after the event, on the exact date of Keith's birthday, Keith's mother received an anonymous envelope which contained pictures of Keith hanging from the tree, wearing different clothes than the set of her son's clothes she had received six years earlier from the police, supposedly as a part of returning Keith's personal possessions.

Along with the pictures, Keith's mother received a note which said, "**Ms. Warren, don't worry, Mark Finley will be next.**" Finley was an associate of Keith's. Finley found out about the threatening note and contacted Keith's mother, "**Ms. Warren, I will be by to see you, I need to unload.**" Finley was also rumored to have bragged at several parties after Keith's body was found in 1986, that he helped put Keith in that tree.

One month later, before he could visit Ms. Warren, Mark Finley was found dead.

According to police, Finley died accidentally when his bike struck a curve and he was thrown from the bike at 2:00 a.m. in the morning. But the ambulance crew was interviewed by the family's private detective, and they said the damage to Finley did not fit the accident. The damage to his face looked like someone had hit him repeatedly with a baseball bat.

As a result of these new developments, the family raised 60,000 dollars and then had the body exhumed seven years after Keith's death. ***"A case such as Keith Warren's must be considered and investigated as a homicide, until proven otherwise,"*** stated Isidore Mihalakis, the medical examiner who examined Keith after the exhumation. He conducted his autopsy in Pennsylvania, far from the tainted turf of Silver Spring, Maryland. The family's medical examiner found a chemical, trichloroethane, in Keith's body. Its levels were so strong it would fell a grown man within seconds of consuming it, stated the coroner, who further added that the amount remaining in the corpse after seven years in the ground was so high it might have ***still*** killed a man upon ingestion.

The family is still out there, in the world, and in the cyber world, struggling to bring attention to this case, and fighting to get justice for Keith.

Again, these are just the names in the public eye, thanks to the tireless efforts of advocates such as documentarian Keith Beauchamp, who responded to the suspicious hanging death of a young man named Bernard Burden (also dating a white woman) by noting, ***"There have been 89 lynchings in the last five years in Georgia [alone], and across the nation, in the prison system and in the streets. All have been ruled suicides."***

But I cannot leave this chapter without this one last mind blowing detail:

My favorite rebuttal to the accumulating public concerns that these tragic deaths of so many black men were not suicides, but rather white supremacist lynchings, certainly has to be the casual response of the sheriff department in the case of the aforementioned Raynard Johnson. Here is why he is sure it was a suicide, not a Klan killing:

"No hate group left a message by the body."

Really? ***Really, officer?*** You aren't getting a message, here? The noose isn't a hint? The dead man dangling from a branch doesn't tip you off? ***(Your humble author's response: "Uh, officer. I believe that the body hanging from the tree IS the message. Hey, I don't exactly need a festive yellow Post-It affixed to the tree bark to let me know loud and clear that this is a genocidal hate crime. Sheesh.)"***

In the end, there are so many horrific lynchings--so many horrific categories of

lynchings, even--that in the end, I suppose I chose to include the lynchings that haunted my nightmares and messed with my sleep for a few months.

And that is not hyperbole. It is a simple truth.

That being said, while the original question in this chapter--*why these lynchings*--may remain somewhat elusive, we have at least had a brief study of the enormous range of categories of lynchings, tragic in their breadth. So now, on to a look at more lynchings in America's Southland--in towns and times, and from mobthink and mindsets, that seem all too much like those observed among the Appomatoxins, who, eerily enough are the citizens of my hometown.

STRANGE FRUIT

By Abel Meeropel (sung by Billie Holiday and others)

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant south,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

NIGHT, DEATH, MISSISSIPPI

By Robert Hayden

1.
A quavering cry. Screech-owl?
Or one of them?
The old man in his reek
and gauntness laughs –
One of them, I bet –

and turns out the kitchen lamp,
limping to the porch to listen
in the windowless night.
Be there with Boy and the rest
if I was well again.
Time was. Time was.
White robes like moonlight
In the sweetgum dark.
Unbucked that one then
and him squealing bloody Jesus
as we cut it off.
Time was. A cry?
A cry all right.
He hawks and spits,
fevered as by groinfire.
Have us a bottle,
Boy and me –
he's earned him a bottle –
when he gets home.

2

Then we beat them, he said,
beat them till our arms was tired
and the big old chains
messy and red.
O Jesus burning on the lily cross
Christ, it was better
than hunting bear
which don't know why
you want him dead.
O night, rawhead and bloodybones night
You kids fetch Paw
some water now so's he
can wash that blood
off him, she said.
O night betrayed by darkness not its own

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LYNCHING OF JESSE WASHINGTON:

"Haven't I one friend in this crowd?"

Of the thousands of lynchings that took place in the Old South, the torture and murder of seventeen year old Jesse Washington was one of the worst. Virtually all historians, black and white, agree on this sad truth.

The facts of the case:

--The body of fifty-three year old Lucy Fryer was found at sundown on May 8th, 1916.

--A neighbor saw seventeen year old Jesse Washington *heading in* from the fields. He was doing *exactly* what he should have been doing, he was *exactly* where he should have been, given his daily routine. But he was seen on the property at the same time that her body was found.

--When he was sought out after the body was found, suspected as the possible murderer, he was *exactly* where he should have been, *back out in the fields*, planting cotton, and Jesse made no attempt to flee. He had made no attempt to flee for the hours after the body was found, nor did he attempt to flee when he saw the authorities moving towards him.

--After being arrested, he seemed to not have any understanding of what was happening to him, as he curled up and fell asleep in the police car.

--Jesse Washington was illiterate and regarded as retarded by most who knew him, yet after his arrest, he was presented with a confession in legalese that he could not possibly have understood. He signed the confession without the help, or even the presence, of a lawyer.

--Although Jesse signed the confession, admitting to the rape and murder of Lucy Friar, the medical examiner found no evidence of rape. According to several eyewitness accounts, members of the sheriff's department had coerced Jesse's signing of this confession by telling him that if he signed it, *he would not be lynched*.

--No physical evidence was ever found on his body or connecting him to the murder. (In subsequent years and decades, cold case forensics experts have made salient arguments that Jesse did not commit any of the crimes of which he was accused.)

--Six inexperienced lawyers were chosen to represent him at his "trial."

--NOT ONE of the six lawyers spoke to Jesse before the trial, which was held just

one week after the murder.

--During the trial, NOT ONE of the six lawyers made any objection to any of the jurors chosen from the jury pool by the prosecution.

--NOT ONE of the six lawyers made any final argument for Jesse.

--The entire rape/murder trial took one hour. It took FOUR MINUTES for the jury to find Jesse Washington guilty.

In the days before the trial, crowds began pouring in from Waco and surrounding counties in excited anticipation of a lynching.

What happened next is explained in Wikipedia, in an exhaustive account compiled by those who are considered experts in what has come to be known as “The First Waco Massacre.” (Specifically, William Carrigan, Patricia Bernstein, Amy Louise Wood, James SoRelle, and Grace Elizabeth Hale.) What follows are their amalgamations of eyewitness accounts, newspaper stories as told in "The Waco Tribune", and the NAACP investigation conducted just days after the lynching.

Note the rampant sadism in the following eyewitness account: not only was Jesse Washington to be pulled in and out of the fire by a chain, to prolong his agony, but his fingers were methodically pruned off and distributed as souvenirs, so that when Jesse attempted to pull himself out of the fire by climbing up the chain, he had no fingers with which to do so.

Eyewitness accounts, compiled:

“After four minutes of deliberation, the jury’s foreman announced a guilty verdict and a sentence of death. The trial lasted about one hour. Court officers approached Washington to escort him away, but were pushed aside by a surge of spectators, who seized Washington and dragged him outside. Washington initially fought back, biting one man, but was soon beaten. A chain was placed around his neck and he was dragged toward city hall by a growing mob; on the way downtown, he was stripped, stabbed, and repeatedly beaten with blunt objects. By the time he arrived at city hall, a group had prepared wood for a bonfire next to a tree in front of the building.

Washington, semiconscious and covered in blood, was doused with oil, hanged from the tree by a chain, and then lowered to the ground. Members of the crowd cut off his fingers, toes, and genitals. The fire was lit and Washington was repeatedly raised and lowered into the flames until he burned to death ... the executioners attempted to keep him alive to increase his suffering. Washington attempted to climb the chain, but was unable to, owing to his lack of fingers.

The fire was extinguished after two hours, allowing bystanders to collect souvenirs from the site of the lynching, including Washington’s bones and links of the chain. One

attendee kept part of Washington's genitalia; a group of children snapped the teeth out of Washington's head to sell as souvenirs.”

(end Wikipedia entry)

But nothing can replace eye witness testimony, and the investigations that were conducted by determined newspaper reporters, and representatives of the NAACP. Read the following collection of first hand accounts, gathered from those who had the courage to walk into the aftershock of this nightmare, so that the facts might be committed to history.

This particular account begins at the end of the one hour trial, and the four minute jury deliberation:

“All of a sudden, as the court officers were preparing to take Washington away, a young farmer in the back cried, **‘Get the nigger!’** A man standing by the judge said, **‘They are coming after him’**, and then the thousands of bodies started rushing in unison to get their hands on Washington. The sheriffs had already silently exited the courtroom to avoid a confrontation with the wave of people.

The mob tackled a terrified Washington and carried him by the collar down the back stairs and out into alley, tearing off his clothes as they went. Once outside they strapped a chain around his neck and proceeded to drag him down Washington Street.

One of the most chilling descriptions came from an observing reporter, who said that Washington ‘became the plaything of the mob.’ As they dragged him down Washington Street, which now holds Waco’s shame in its name, the young black boy cried out, **‘Haven’t I one friend in this crowd?’** He didn’t. The crowd had already begun slashing him with their knives and he was covered in blood before the square was reached. Every man had his turn at the plaything, with shovels, bricks, clubs, and anything that could inflict pain.

The chainholders turned on Second Street to take Jesse to City Hall to burn him alive, in the direction of the iron benches and the Tree of Knowledge. At City Hall they threw the chain wrapped around Washington’s throat over a tree limb and pulled on it to hoist him up and dangle him before the crowd of 10,000 to 15,000 that packed into the city square.

Washington grasped at the chain around his neck; the men closest grabbed his arms and cut off his fingers so that he would stop. The Times Herald wrote: **‘Fingers, ears, pieces of clothing, toes and other parts of the negro’s body were cut off by members of the mob that had crowded the scene as if by magic.’** At least one onlooker testified later that the mob swept in to “unsex” Jesse Washington.

Stories abound from later years in which residents proudly show off parts of Jesse’s

body to the young like souvenirs, saving them in attics or in jars of formaldehyde.

The hanging and the knifing were not enough for the incensed mob, though. A box of kindling was placed below Washington's feet, and set on fire. The man holding the chain dipped Washington's body, half alive and half dead, in and out of the blazing box for the enjoyment of the packed crowd. The Mayor watched from the window of his office in City Hall. Coal oil was poured over Washington's body to intensify the fire, and as it overwhelmed his red body **'shouts of delight went up from thousands of throats.'** Astonishingly, Washington was still not dead at this point; he was very strong.

After two hours nothing was left of Washington's body but a skull, torso, and stumps of his former limbs. Everything else was either smoldering on the ground or tucked greedily away in coat pockets or hats."

Reported the Waco Semi-Weekly Tribune, "About mid-afternoon, a horseman came along, lassoed what was left of Washington's body and began to drag it around the square and then through the streets of town while waving his hat in the air.

Somewhere along the way the skull bounced loose from the rest of the body and was placed on the doorstep of a prostitute on Two Street, where it was picked up by a group of small boys who extracted the teeth and sold them for five dollars each.

The rest of the body, now tied behind a car, was dragged all the way back to Robinson (Washington's home town), and hanged from a telephone pole in front of a blacksmith's shop for everyone to see. Toward the end of the day, Constable Les Stegall went out and picked up the sack and brought it back to town, where the little that was left of Jesse Washington was buried in the local potter's field."

(End excerpts)

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I researched this American tragedy exhaustively, so that we might get a better idea of just who Jesse Washington was. As will be the case in subsequent chapters, I have struggled to put a human face on the doomed--to give the victim a family, a past, a present, hopes for the future, a personality, a soul. Yet virtually no information except for that offered above seems to exist about the sad victim of this lynching. Somehow, for me, that makes it even more tragic. To paraphrase Phillip Roth, he was, to the mob who murdered him, nothing more than "a human stain."

I cannot imagine what I would have to add to this. Unless, of course, I could attempt to answer the question of why bring up a horror which transpired so long ago? Why not just forget it?

It is in the forgetting of it that we sow the seeds of the next atrocity. Have we not all,

at some time or another, been reminded of the words of George Santayana: "***Those who do not remember the past are doomed to repeat it.***"

THE LYNCHING
by Claude McKay

His spirit in smoke ascended to high heaven.
His Father, by the cruelest way of pain,
Had bidden him to his bosom once again;
The awful sin remained still unforgiven.
All night a bright and solitary star
(Perchance the one that ever guided him,
Yet gave him up at last to Fate's wild whim)
Hung pitifully o'er the swinging char.
Day dawned, and soon the mixed crowds came to view
The ghastly body swaying in the sun
The women thronged to look, but never a one
Showed sorrow in her eyes of steely blue;
And little lads, lynchers that were to be,
Danced round the dreadful thing in fiendish glee.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LYNCHING OF MARY TURNER

"Get that Nigga Baby off me!"

It is the stuff of one's most terrifying death dreams, the worst kind of slasher movies. It is the stuff of the most frightening ghost stories, becoming legend and being retold, even as the ghosts refuse to go in peace. It is the stuff of our worst nightmares: to be a small child, hiding out in a field, terrified of being caught as witness to an atrocity, and thus, becoming victim of the atrocity as well.

But this is no dream, no film, no story.

This is fact: these are the facts in the case of the killing of Mary Turner.

AN EYEWITNESS

excerpted from, "A Place to Lay Their Heads"

By C. Tyrone Forehand, Great Grand Nephew of Mary Turner

Rufus Morrison was only ten years old when he was hiding in a corn field along Ryalls Road and witnessed Mary Turner's execution. The memory of a frightened and bewildered woman was forever etched in his mind, as he saw the mob tie a rope to her ankles and hoist her upside down from a tree. They taunted and jeered and terrified Mary as they began to roast her alive. One of the members took a swig of moonshine from a jug and spat it on her as another dared to slit open her abdomen, where her unborn child was impervious to the fate which was about to befall it.

Upon rupturing her womb, the birthing matter which provided nourishment to her unsuspecting baby, spewed over three of Mary's executioners.

It was reported through the years that each of those whom the birthing matter touched died horrific deaths, one shouting on his death bed, ***"Get that Nigga baby off me!"***

Those who witnessed the violent act of cowardice stated that the sky became dark as the mob completed its task.

(end excerpt)

Such a horror story renders us mute--momentarily. But then we are compelled to ask, what did that poor woman do to deserve such a cruel fate?

The answer is a convoluted story of brutality and mob hysteria that was to turn an entire county upside down, stain its place in history, and cause the death of over a dozen innocent black citizens at the hands of a ruthless lynch mob. The exact list of the victims will never be known.

The story of this true nightmare begins with a villain named Hampton Smith, a virtual stereotype of the cruel plantation owner who, although slavery had been outlawed decades ago, thought nothing of beating his sharecroppers and brutally whipping their wives while husbands were forced to witness.

After the week long ordeal ended--after the lynchings and the mass exodus of hundreds of terrified blacks from the county--Walter White of the NAACP came down to Valdosta, Georgia and conducted an exhaustive investigation.

The year is 1918, the merry month of May. Our story begins with an excerpt from Walter White's investigation:

"Hampton Smith, whose murder was the immediate cause of the holocaust of lynchings, was the owner of a large plantation in Brooks County. He bore a very poor reputation in the community because of ill treatment of his Negro employees. Smith's reputation in this respect had become so wide-spread that he had the greatest difficulty in securing any help whatever.

He therefore adopted the expedient of going into the courts and whenever a Negro was convicted and was unable to pay his fine or was sentenced to serve a period in the chain gang, Smith would secure his release and put him to work out his fine on his plantation.

Sidney Johnson, (the Negro who would later, before his death, confess that he had killed Smith), had been fined thirty dollars for gaming. Smith paid his fine and Johnson was put to work on the former's plantation until the thirty dollars had been worked out. Johnson had worked out the period and had put in considerable more time, and had asked Smith to pay him for the additional time that he had served. Smith refused and a quarrel resulted.

A few days later, Johnson did not show up for work in the fields and Smith went to Johnson's cabin to discover the reason. Johnson told Smith that he was sick, and unable to work. Smith thereupon began to beat him, in spite of the protestations of the victim. Johnson is said then to have threatened Smith and a few nights later, while sitting in his home, Smith was shot twice through the window near which he was sitting, dying

instantly.”

(end Walter White's NAACP excerpt)

Now, the vengeance begins. Now, the powder keg has been lit. News of the murder spreads like wildfire throughout the white community. A plantation owner dead, murdered by a n--
--the headlines fly:

HAMPTON SMITH OF BARNEY IS ASSASSINATED,
NEGRO BLAMED! POSSE ON TRAIL OF NEGRO!
LYNCHING WILL FOLLOW IF ASSASSIN CAPTURED!

--The Daily Observer, May 17th, 1918

Citizens gather, they become angry mobs, and posses of vengeful men on horseback spread out. Packs of dogs are readied to scour the swamps and woodland.

And now, a rumor spreads that the plantation owner's death was actually part of a larger conspiracy (no evidence whatsoever has ever been offered or uncovered to prove this), and suddenly the mob has justified the lynching of a large number of blacks.

Rumor has it that this group of conspirators met at the home of Hayes Turner, another Negro who has suffered at the hands of Smith, and his wife, Mary Turner, whom Smith had beaten on several occasions.

Hayes Turner, it is said, had previously served a term in the chain gang for threatening Smith, following cruel Hampton Smith's beating of Turner's young wife, Mary.

Gather the ropes...

It would take an entire book to cover just the Mary Turner incident, which started with the murder of the cruel plantation owner and ended with the mass exodus of a terrified black population. It is, in fact, an entire book. Several excellent books have been written about it.

But for our purposes, we will list the hunted and the dead, and try to impart a sense of the mob psychosis that ruled the white male community for the next few days, following the shooting of Hampton Smith:

The first of the mob's innocent black victims to be captured was Will Head, who was caught on Friday morning, May 17th, and the second was Will Thompson, seized later on the same day. That night, both were lynched just outside of Valdosta. As White writes in his report, ***“Members of the mob stated to the investigators that over seven hundred bullets were fired into the bodies of the two men.”***

On Saturday morning, May 18th, Hayes Turner, husband of the doomed Mary Turner, was arrested, and his fate was sealed. Hayes Turner was arrested for no other reason than that he knew the man who had shot plantation owner Smith. This connection should have been meaningless, of course, as all of the sharecroppers knew one another. When he was arrested, Hayes Turner was taken to the Quitman jail--and then it is here is where the story gets murky:

It is now Sunday, May 19th. Hayes was being transferred by Sheriff Wade and Clerk of the Court Roland Knight, to another location in Moultrie--but were these men moving Turner with the intention of protecting him from the lynch mob?

Or, as in the case of the 1964 slaying of the three civil rights workers in Mississippi, were the authorities in league with the lynch mob, and placing Turner in a known place on an open road, where he could be kidnapped from the so-called “authorities”?

Only the ghosts will ever know.

Suffice it to say that he was seized, castrated, and lynched just a few miles outside of Moultrie, his body allowed to hang there for days. During that Sunday following the lynching, hundreds of automobiles, buggies, and wagons bore sightseers to the spot, while many more tramped there on foot. Eventually, Hayes was cut down and buried about fifty feet from the tree on which he was lynched.

To return again to Walter White's accounting of the dead:

“Another Negro was lynched on Saturday afternoon near Morven at a spot known as the Old Camp Ground. This person may have been Eugene Rice, whose name appeared in the Georgia press, among the identified and acknowledged victims, but who was never even remotely connected with Hampton Smith's killing.

About a week after the tragedy, or tragedies started, the bodies of three unidentified Negroes were taken from Little River, below Barney. It is not known whether these bodies were those of some already accounted for, or whether these were additional victims of the mob. At the last accounts, the bodies themselves had disappeared and could not be accounted for.

Then, Chime Riley, another Negro who was supposed to have left the community, was found by the investigators to have been lynched instead. By the time he was killed, the mob evidently had begun to become fearful of too many outrages and determined to conceal his body. Although no one seems to have even remotely connected him with the

murder of Smith, his hands and feet were tied together, and turpentine cups, made from clay and used to catch gum from the pine trees when “chipped,” thus becoming very heavy, were tied to his body and he was thrown into the Little River near Barney. The informant in this case...stated that when the river was low, he had gone down to see if the body had come up. Finding no trace of the body, he assumed that it had become lodged in a sandbar. He stated that he found one of the cups, however, which he was keeping as a souvenir.

During the outbreak, another Negro by the name of Simon Schuman, who lived on Moultrie Road near Berlin, was called to the door of his home one night between eight and nine o'clock. He was seized and had not been seen since. The interior of his house was demolished, his family being driven out, and the furniture was hacked to pieces. His family had fled following his lynching.”

Here ends Walter White's excerpt.

But you surely have noticed that in this list of victims, we have not mentioned the murder of Mary Turner.

Shortly following the castration and lynching of her innocent husband, Mary Turner, a brave young nineteen year old, and the only person willing to restrain her anger and invoke the legal system, according to Walter White's report, ***“made the remark that the killing of her husband was unjust, and that if she knew the names of the persons in the mob who lynched her husband, she would have warrants sworn out against them.”***

The Associated Press at the time had a unique phraseology to describe young Mary's reaction, and her words that would lead to her being burned while alive. White continues, ***“The Associated Press wrote that Mary Turner had made ‘unwise remarks’, and that the people, in their indignant mood, took exception to her remarks, as well as her attitude.”***

And so here I offer you yet another eyewitness account of what happened to Mary Turner after she dared protest the lynching and castrating of her innocent husband, who was left for days to hang from a tree and be gawked at by tourists, and whose only crime was being in acquaintance with the shooter.

But this eyewitness account is not the terrified testimony of a small child hiding in the cornfield, that true eyewitness account which opened this chapter.

This is one of the mob, one of the lynch men, who was obviously relishing the task

that lay ahead. And this eyewitness testimony was gathered by none other than NAACP investigator Walter White.

From Walter White's investigation:

“Not finding the Negro suspected of the murder, mobs began to kill every Negro who could even be connected with the victim and the alleged slayer. One of these was a man named Hayes Turner, whose offense was that he knew the alleged slayer, a not altogether remarkable circumstance, since both men worked for the dead farmer.

To Turner's wife, within one month of accouchement, was brought the news of her husband's death. She cried out in her sorrow, pouring maledictions upon the heads of those who had thrust widowhood upon her so abruptly and cruelly.

Word of her threat to swear out warrants for the arrest of her husband's murderers spread to the mob.

'We'll teach the damn nigger wench some sense!' was their answer, as they began to seek her. Fearful, her friends secreted the sorrowing woman on an obscure farm, miles away. Sunday morning, with a hot May sun beating down, they found her.

Securely they bound her ankles together and by them, hanged her to a tree. Gasoline and motor oil were thrown upon her dangling clothes; a match wrapped her in sudden flames. Mocking, ribald laughter from her tormentors answered the helpless woman's screams of pain and terror. ***'Mister, you ought to've heard the nigger wench howl!'*** a member of the mob boasted to me a few days later as we stood at the place of Mary Turner's death.

The clothes burned from her crisply toasted body, in which unfortunately, life still lingered, a man stepped towards the woman and, with his knife, ripped open the abdomen in a crude Cesarean operation. Out tumbled the prematurely born child. Two feeble cries it gave--and received for answer the heel of a stalwart man, as life was ground out of the tiny form. Under the tree of death was scooped a shallow hole. The rope about Mary Turner's charred ankles was cut, and swiftly her body tumbled into its grave. Not without a sense of humor or of appropriateness was some member of the mob. An empty whisky-bottle, quart size, was given for a headstone. Into its neck was stuck a half-smoked cigar, which had saved the delicate nostrils of one member of the mob from the stench of burning human flesh.”

(end excerpt)

(For those of you who are curious, as was I, as to how Walter White, a prominent member of the NAACP, could consistently extract such candid and cruel eyewitness accounts from white lynch mobs and other assorted witnesses, the facts were these: he

was well educated and of mixed ancestry, and although he considered himself a proud black man, he had blue eyes, blond hair, and rather pale skin. A fascinating man, worthy of being Wikipediad by anyone who admires a brave culture warrior. He even came very close to joining the KKK sub rosa, and when his ruse was discovered, quite nearly became himself the victim of a Klan lynching.)

Three days after the murder of Mary Turner and her baby, Sydney Johnson, the man who had admitted to the murder of white plantation owner Hampton Smith, and who emphasized that he alone was responsible, was killed in a shoot-out with police on South Troup Street in Valdosta, Georgia. Once Johnson was dead, the crowd of more than 700 people cut off his genitals and threw them into the street. A rope was then tied to his neck and he was dragged to Campground Church in Morven, Georgia, sixteen miles away. There, what remained of his body was burned.

As far as justice for the dead is concerned:

Although the names of those who participated in the lynchings and murders were known, and reported to Georgia Governor Hugh Dorsey, no charges were ever brought against anyone. He let them all go free.

And now, to end this tragic story, we return to the words of C. Tyrone Forehand, Great Grand Nephew of Mary Turner, in his elegant elegy, "A Place to Lay Their Heads".

"There was no place of safety for Hayes, his wife Mary, their unborn baby, or any of the other fifteen victims of the mob mentality that caused the otherwise respectable, law abiding, Christian men and women of these Southern Communities to deteriorate into a pack of roving animals bent on destroying the lives of anyone whose skin did not look like their own.

Following their violent and brutal deaths at the hands of those who had no shame, and never took blame to be judged on this side of life, these powerless and innocent victims of unspeakable acts of human atrocities had no place to lay their heads.

Today, Hampton Smith, the brutal farmer whose death was the spark that lit the keg of violence in this seemingly peaceful Southern town, has an edifice which stands more than six feet tall to mark his place of rest in the Pauline Cemetery off of Georgia Highway 133.

Descendants of those who executed Mary enjoy roads named in their ancestors' honor.

And William Folsom, who owned the property where the lives of Mary and her

unborn child were so viciously taken, has a bridge which bears his name as tribute to his contributions to the town of Barney.

But one is left to ask, who cried and paid honor to the life of Mary, Hayes, and their baby? For many a year, our ancestors have cried out to our spirits, pleading for their stories to be told.

Today we answer.

On Saturday, May 16th, 2009, at the Hahira Community Center, more than two hundred people, both black and white, joined descendants of Hayes and Mary Turner to commemorate this dark stain on our nation's history. The ceremony was organized by those spearheading the Mary Turner Project, a group of faculty and students of Valdosta State University's Women and Gender Studies Department, and residents of the South Georgia community.

In an interesting twist of fate, or perhaps it was just coincidence, on the very day of this historic and long overdue event, the sky again became dark, as it was reported to have been some ninety-one years ago, on that tragic day... ”

(end excerpt)

One can imagine that in a South which sings, “*Gimme that old time religion,*” such a religious world would send the murderers of Mary--and of her baby, and of the host of other innocent souls--to a Southerly region far hotter than Valdosta, Georgia in the summertime.

And as to the eyewitness in the lynch mob who described with bloodlust the murdering of Mary's child: “***Out tumbled the prematurely born child. Two feeble cries it gave--and received for answer the heel of a stalwart man, as life was ground out of the tiny form.***”

I looked up the word “stalwart” in the dictionary. It means, “***One who is physically or morally strong...marked by outstanding strength and vigor, of mind, body, or spirit.***”

Well, murderer, to your spirit, burning in hell, I would ask, “How much physical or moral strength does it take to jam your boot down onto the crying form of an eight month old fetus?”

Enjoy your moonshine.

As to Mary Turner and her husband Hayes Turner, and to their unborn child, and to the other long list of innocent victims, may you rest in peace. That peace of God, Shantih,

the Peace that Passeth Understanding.

THE HAUNTED OAK
By Paul Laurence Dunbar

Pray why are you so bare, so bare,
Oh, bough of the old oak-tree;
And why, when I go through the shade you throw,
Runs a shudder over me?

My leaves were green as the best, I trow,
And sap ran free in my veins,
But I say in the moonlight dim and weird
A guiltless victim's pains.

They'd charged him with the old, old crime,
And set him fast in jail:
Oh, why does the dog howl all night long,
And why does the night wind wail?

He prayed his prayer and he swore his oath,
And he raised his hand to the sky;
But the beat of hoofs smote on his ear,
And the steady tread drew nigh.

Who is it rides by night, by night,
Over the moonlit road?
And what is the spur that keeps the pace,
What is the galling goad?

And now they beat at the prison door,
"Ho, keeper, do not stay!
We are friends of him whom you hold within,
And we fain would take him away

"From those who ride fast on our heels
With mind to do him wrong;
They have no care for his innocence,

And the rope they bear is long."

They have fooled the jailer with lying words,
They have fooled the man with lies;
The bolts unbar, the locks are drawn,
And the great door open flies.

Now they have taken him from the jail,
And hard and fast they ride,
And the leader laughs low down in his throat,
As they halt my trunk beside.

Oh, the judge, he wore a mask of black,
And the doctor one of white,
And the minister, with his oldest son,
Was curiously bedight.

Oh, foolish man, why weep you now?
'Tis but a little space,
And the time will come when these shall dread
The mem'ry of your face.

I feel the rope against my bark,
And the weight of him in my grain,
I feel in the throe of his final woe
The touch of my own last pain.

And never more shall leaves come forth
On the bough that bears the ban;
I am burned with dread, I am dried and dead,
From the curse of a guiltless man.

And ever the judge rides by, rides by,
And goes to hunt the deer,
And ever another rides his soul
In the guise of a mortal fear.

And ever the man he rides me hard,
And never a night stays he;

For I feel his curse as a haunted bough,
On the trunk of a haunted tree.

CHAPTER SIX

EMMETT TILL, PART 1

"For the whole world to see ... "

Google Images; Emmett Till

"The small boy has morphed into a large, bloated mass of flesh after days in the water. The face has been beaten so badly that it--he--does not even look like a human being anymore, unless one could say with some degree of accuracy that the face on the corpse resembles that of the Elephant Man. This looks like the face of a monster, but herein lies the irony: this body, this boy, was not the monster. He was the victim of monsters."

--"Wigger" Author's Reaction

"Have you ever sent a loved son on vacation and had him returned to you in a pine box, so horribly battered and water-logged that someone needs to tell you this sickening sight is your son -- lynched?"

--Mamie Bradley, Mother of Emmett Till

The Murderer Milam's confession:

"Well, what else could we do? He was hopeless. I'm no bully; I never hurt a nigger in my life. I like niggers -- in their place -- I know how to work 'em. But I just decided it was time a few people got put on notice. As long as I live and can do anything about it, niggers are gonna stay in their place. Niggers ain't gonna vote where I live. If they did, they'd control the government. They ain't gonna go to school with my kids. And when a nigger gets close to mentioning sex with a white woman, he's tired o' livin'. I'm likely to kill him. Me and my folks fought for this country, and we've got some rights. I stood there in that shed and listened to that nigger throw that poison at me, and I just made up my mind. 'Chicago boy,' I said, 'I'm tired of 'em sending your kind down here to stir up trouble. Goddam you, I'm going to make an example of you -- just so everybody can know how me and my folks stand.' "

Excerpted from 'Look' Magazine,

January 24th 1956

Available on emmettillmurder.com

Among the many moving and significant tributes to Emmett Till are two documentaries, both noteworthy, but available for view on YouTube at no cost. The first documentary, “The Murder of Emmett Till” was produced by Stanley Nelson for broadcast on PBS. The other is entitled “The Untold Story of Emmett Till,” and was produced by Keith Beauchamp after ten exhaustive years of research. I highly recommend both, for anybody who wants a deeper understanding of the American experience and the true fight for freedom and justice in this great country.

Please note that all quotations in this chapter ending with ‘03 refer to the 2003 PBS documentary, while all quotations ending in ‘05 are attributable to the 2005 Keith Beauchamp documentary. The author is grateful to have been able to cite from these films the keen insights into the hearts and minds of those involved in the Emmett Till murder and its aftermath.

Mamie Till was a single mother, and it seemed that she was always destined to be so.

And it further seemed that it was her destiny to keep her son Emmett right by her side, safe in her heart, until she died at the gentle old age of 81. For you see, her son Emmett was brutally murdered when he was just fourteen years old. Yet one could say that if anything, Emmett’s death brought the two of them closer than ever. She would spend her life fighting for his memory, and for the cause of civil rights. Her personal role in this fight was instigated by Emmett’s horrific and untimely death.

Mamie did well for herself and her family from the very beginning. Her family made a wise decision to leave Mississippi in 1922, when Mamie was just one year old, and they made a home for themselves in Chicago. As a young girl, Mamie attended Argo Community High School, which was predominantly white, and she went on to be only the fourth black student to graduate from that school. She was, in fact, the first black student to make the A Honor Roll. When she was eighteen, she met Louis Till, they were married, and nine months later, Emmett came along.

Emmett never knew his father, who served in World War II. In 1945, when Emmett was only four, Mamie got word that Louis Till had died in Italy. All she received of his possessions was a signet ring inscribed with his initials.

Although Emmett was stricken with polio at the age of five, he recovered fully except for a slight stutter. By all accounts, Emmett Till loved life. He loved telling jokes, and was even known to pay people to tell him jokes.

“When we first met, we were in gym in Mr. Long’s gym period. I remember Emmett raising his shirt up to about his naval and making his belly roll just waves of fat, we laughed and laughed, it just broke us up, the whole gym went crazy. He was that kind of kid.”

--Richard Heard, Emmett’s childhood friend, 2003

Emmett always pitched in with the chores. He loved to fix his mother pork chops and cornbread. Mamie recalled that Emmett once told her, *“If you can go out and make the money, I can take care of the house.”* This was welcome news for a woman raising a child alone. *“It was just like I was carrying a load and I laid it down,”* she said. Emmett’s dream was to become either a policeman or a baseball player.

Emmett, nicknamed Bobo, was surrounded throughout his youth by a large and loving family. He attended the all-black McCosh Elementary School not far from his home. The solidly middle class neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side where he grew up was a city of new hope, in which black-owned establishments thrived. Good paying jobs were available for the thousands of new immigrants fleeing the oppression of the southern states. Although blacks and whites were segregated, it was a fertile time for black businesses. There were black-owned and operated insurance companies, tailors, pharmacists, barbers, beauty salons and nightclubs that regularly hosted performers like Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Dinah Washington and Sarah Vaughn.

The year was 1955, and a visit to the bayou world of Mississippi to visit his mother’s family seemed exotic and exciting to the young thirteen year old boy. By the time he was ready for the trip, he had just turned fourteen--the bloom of youth. Smart, charming, and known as a natty dresser, he did not seem too self-conscious about his lisp. But before this young Negro boy was allowed to go on his journey, his family warned Emmett in no uncertain terms: black-white relations were a far different matter in the South than they were in Chicago. And Emmett made it clear to his mother that he understood. After all, the Southern legacy of lynchings and the torture that preceded them were legendary, the stuff of very real horror stories.

“For blacks in those days, it was against the law to say ‘yes’ and ‘no’ to white folks. You could be beaten and even killed for saying just ‘yeah’ and not calling him by his name ... We couldn’t get a drink of water, no matter how thirsty we were. Unless we found that colored water fountain, we couldn’t get a drink of water out of the fountain ...Our school time was maybe 3 to 6 months a year, and we had no busses, we had to walk to school there, four or five miles, whatever...”

--Charles Evers, brother of Medger Evers, 2005

(Medger Evers would later attend the infamous murder trial that arose out of one small boy's vacation to the Mississippi Delta.)

"I had a cousin that was living in Mississippi, and he was walking down the sidewalk downtown, and he didn't get off the sidewalk, and a man slapped him and knocked him off the sidewalk, and he got up--and instead of killing the man like he wanted to, he just started walking and never stopped until he got to Memphis, and then he never stopped until he got to Chicago."

Ernest Withers, Till murder trial photographer, 2003 interview

"My brother was beaten almost to death in Jackson, just because he went to Walgreen's and sat down to have a Sundae. They beat him unmercifully. No matter how wealthy you were as a black, those who had any money, it was no different, you were just another nigger."

--Charles Evers, brother of Medger Evers, 2005

The day before Emmett left, Mamie gave him Louis Till's signet ring, one of the few possessions she had from her dead husband. The next day, Mamie and Emmett waited at the train station. When she kissed him goodbye, she could not possibly have known that it would be the last time she would ever see her son alive:

"Oh, that day will live in infamy, so far as I'm concerned. I got up that morning and for some reason we could not get out of that house. We could hear the whistle blowing as we got to the steps, he tore up the steps, and I said 'Wait a minute, you didn't kiss me goodbye! Where are you going? How do I know you'll ever see me again?' And he said 'Oh mama!' He really scolded me! But Emmett turned around, came back and gave me a kiss...and then he gave me his watch, and he said 'Here, take this watch, I won't need it where I'm going,' and I said 'O.K., I'll wear it' and I put it on, and I said 'What about your ring?', because I'd given him his daddy's signet ring for the first time, and he said 'Well I'm gonna show this off to the fellas.' " -- Mamie Till, 2005

THE HEAT SETTLES IN...

It is a sixteen hour train ride to Money, Mississippi and Emmett Till has arrived at the house of his great uncle, Mose Wright, where he beds down with a bevy of cousins. The tiny town of Money is a mere whistle-stop in the heart of Delta cotton country. It's not a town, really, just one street with a half a dozen stores.

At one end sits Bryant's Grocery. Roy Bryant, a twenty-four year old ex-soldier, owns the store; he and his wife live behind it with their two little boys in a couple of cramped rooms.

This small general store would suddenly change Emmett's life--then end it.

Cut to: A few days pass. It is the 21st of August, 1955. A hot, humid Wednesday.

After a long day of working the cotton fields, the boys--old Mose Wright's grandsons and grand nephews--all head to Bryant's General Store. The boys go in one and two at a time, which is the proper decorum for young blacks patronizing a small store run by a white person. Emmett Till goes inside to buy some bubble gum. Behind the counter is Carolyn Bryant, the white wife of the proprietor.

What happened after that is a matter of conjecture, depending on whom you ask, on what version you get. Some said it was as innocent as the fact that Till's lisp turned some letters into whistling sounds, others said he simply whistled at her or might have casually called her "baby" or some slang of endearment. But by Carolyn Bryant's account, Till actually put his arm around her and asked her for a date, and bragged about his experience with white women--Till, who had just turned fourteen.

But a relative of Till's who saw what actually happened tells of what she saw transpire:

"He asked for two cents worth of bubble gum. He put the money into her hand and she jumped her hand back."

--Ruthie May Crawford, Emmett Till's cousin, eyewitness to the incident, 2003

One of the great frustrations that occurs when researching the atrocities of America's racist history is that there is no real record of what actually happened in so many of these crimes. But even the most rudimentary common sense indicates that many people simply lied outright about what led up to these lynchings.

Investigators, particularly those who came down from the North when lynchings were reaching epidemic proportions, often proved that witnesses had lied, but by then it was obviously too late for the poor tortured, deceased victim. And nothing usually happened to the witnesses or participants whose lies had led to an innocent man--or woman's--death.

Regarding Emmett Till, it is my belief that after being warned repeatedly about the delicacy of black-white relations in the South, and being an intelligent young man by all accounts, it is hardly conceivable that, in broad daylight, Till would actually put his arm

around a married white woman and ask her for a date, as Carolyn Bryant alleged he did.

“When white women was on the streets, you had to get off the street, that was the way of life. And all a white woman would have to say was ‘that nigger kind of looked at me or sassed me’, so we’re talking about a way of life that, in this part of the country, was enforced by law.”

--Emmett Till’s cousin, witness to the kidnapping, 2003

But whatever the misunderstanding was that transpired in Bryant’s store, it marked Emmett Till for death.

Carolyn’s husband, Roy Bryant, was away for a few days, working a job elsewhere, but when he got back, he immediately began investigating, nosing around, asking questions ... until Saturday night, August 28th, 1955. Roy Bryant was determined to seek revenge on the uppity black boy who had supposedly insulted his wife.

His investigation led him to the home of old Mose Wright, where Emmett Till lay sleeping upstairs. Roy had enlisted the help of his half-brother, J.W. Milam, to help him ***“teach that boy from Chicago a lesson.”*** By the time they knocked on old Mose Wright’s front door, it was well past midnight. Mose Wright vividly recalls what happened next:

“Sunday morning about two-thirty, I heard a voice at the door, and I said ‘Who is it?’ And he said, ‘This is Mr. Bryant. I want to talk with you and the boy.’ And when I opened the door, I saw a man with a pistol in one hand and a flashlight in the other. And he asked me, ‘Did I have a boy there from Chicago?’, and I said I have, and they said ‘I want the boy who did all that talk.’ ”

--Mose Wright, 2003

Emmett’s cousin, sleeping in the same bed with him, recounted, decades later, the horror he felt at his cousin’s abduction:

“The house was as dark as a thousand midnights. You couldn’t see, it was like a nightmare ... I mean, someone comes and stands over you with a flashlight in one hand and a pistol in the other, and you’re just sixteen years old. This is a terrifying experience.”

--The Reverend Wheeler Parker, cousin to Emmett Till, 2003

Meanwhile, Mose Wright begged the two white men not to take the boy. Mose’s wife offered to pay the white men money. But the two men were determined to take Emmett Till off into the night. When those in the house tried to stop them, they were told they

would be killed if they got in the way. Mose Wright, his wife, and the rest were told that the white men were just going to beat some sense into Emmett, then let him go.

Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam drove around for hours, stopping in various locations to pistol whip a terrified Emmett Till. When and where they castrated him is still a matter of conjecture. At one point, their stop was public enough to evoke the curiosity of a passerby: the acquaintance noted all the blood in the truck bed, and the two men bragged that they “had just killed a deer.”

Then, they drove to a crag above the Tallahatchie River and shot Emmett Till dead.

Finally, they tied his body to a seventy-five pound cotton gin fan, submerging him in the swampy waters below. And thus ended the short, tragic life of Emmett Till.

Emmett’s body surfaced in a matter of days, about a mile down the Tallahatchie. It was found by some young boys fishing.

And that was when Emmett Till’s mother, Mamie Till, got the call in Chicago.

Even though she is being interviewed fifty years after receiving the call informing her that Emmett’s body has been found in the Tallahatchie River, one can see from her eyes that she remembers the awful moment as though it was yesterday.

“Those words were like arrows sticking all over my body. My eyes were so full of tears until I couldn’t see, and when I began to make the announcement that Emmett had been found--and how he was found--the whole house began to scream and to cry. And that’s when I realized that this was a load that I was going to have to carry. I wouldn’t get any help carrying this load.”

--Mamie Till, 2003

Of course, Mamie was to receive help, a vast outpouring of help, but who can doubt that whatever she went through from that moment on cannot be understood, can not even be imagined with any degree of accuracy, by anybody else--except those other tragic few who have lost a child too soon, and to such unfathomable violence.

Mamie recounted the hell which began that day, and which continued relentlessly:

“I called my mother when I got the news. Mother told me to come right over and she would start making calls. I got over there as quickly as I could make it and that wasn’t very long ... I felt such a vibration coming from her to me until I jumped back, because it seemed I was going to take her life away from her... it seemed that her life was draining into me, and I could feel myself building up, getting strong enough to carry on.”

--Mamie Till, 2005

Then, (at least as far as your humble author is concerned), this starts to sound even more like a grisly movie plot than actual history. Sheriff Clarence Strider--who cannot help but come across more and more like the evil villain in this story--realizes that he has a problem on his hands. A big problem. Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam have all but bragged about the kidnapping, with the act of murder implicit. Their claim is that they just roughed Emmett Till up and dropped him off. And they know that nobody will care about one uppity black boy from the North.

But now that the body has literally surfaced, it is a different matter.

Strider pulls strings to make sure that the body gets buried as quickly as possible; he has seen the condition of the body and can only imagine the kind of stir that it will cause among the local blacks and those NAACP troublemakers from the North.

But meanwhile, Mamie Till is taking some of that strength imparted to her by her mother and her God, and she is making arrangements to get her boy back. Back to Chicago.

Disrespectful Sheriff Strider gets a pine box, has the body thrown in the box, fills it with lime, and hastily informs next of kin when and where the burial will be.

But, just like a movie, only a couple of hours before the funeral is set to begin--in Strider's mind, getting this whole matter buried and done with, literally--a court order arrives at the very last minute, with instructions to stop the funeral.

Strider is forced to give up control of the corpse. He has no choice. But he only agrees to ship it from Mississippi to Chicago if it is securely padlocked, and sealed forever by the Great Seal of the Great State of Mississippi.

Imagine that you are the mother of a murdered boy. Do you really think that a padlock and a state seal are going to stop you from seeing what happened to your son at the hands of murderers? Are you going to shrink from the opportunity to hold your child in one final embrace, from saying goodbye to your boy for the last time?

Funeral director A. A. Rayner received the body in Chicago, with instructions that the oversized coffin containing the grotesquely bloated body not be opened. Ever.

Mamie Till received word that her son's remains had arrived in Chicago. She went to the funeral home, and was told that she could not see Emmett.

It was at that point that Mamie Till politely asked for a hammer. Because if Rayner refused to open it, she most certainly would. By any means necessary. Mamie agreed to leave the funeral home and return after three hours, so that Rayner could get a chance to "put things in order."

The next nightmare unfolds in Mamie Till's own words:

“When he called me, and I came back to the funeral home, about three blocks away, an odor met me that nearly knocked me out. I said what in the world was that? It was Emmett’s body. That’s how strong the smell was...Emmett covered a two or three block area.”

--Mamie Till, 2005

Then, Mamie Till describes in painstaking, agonizing detail her examination of her son's corpse:

“I decided I would start at his feet and work my way up, maybe gathering strength as I went. I paused at his midsection because I knew he would not want me looking at him, but I saw enough that I knew he was intact. I kept on up until I got to his chin and then I was forced to deal with his face. I saw that his tongue was choked out. I noticed that the right eye was lying midway on his cheek. I noticed that his nose had been broken, like somebody took a meat chopper and chopped his nose in several places. As I kept looking I saw a hole which I presumed was a bullet hole, and I could look through that hole and see daylight on the other side, and I wondered, was it necessary to shoot him? ...

...Mr. Rayner asked me, he said, ‘do you want me to touch the body up?’ I said ‘No Mr. Rayner. Let the people see what I’ve seen.’ I was just willing to bear it all, I thought. Everybody needed to know what happened to Emmett Till.”

--Mamie Till 2005

It was at this point that Mamie Till made an astonishingly brave decision, one which must have taken every iota of maternal strength she had. She insisted on an open casket funeral, so that the whole world could see what had happened to her baby. And after a shouting match with the reluctant funeral director, Emmett's mother got her wish.

Emmett Till's partially decomposed body and his beaten, mutilated face would be there. ***“For the whole world to see...”***

And Mamie Till's instincts were correct: what started out as a story in the black press became a national firestorm of headlines, as all of America saw Emmett Till, just one week ago the essence of youth, now bloated and battered beyond all recognition.

Under the glare of the ever-widening publicity, white Mississippians began to close ranks. Even though Milam and Bryant were viewed as “white trash” by the more wealthy

and “refined” citizens of Mississippi, they were, nonetheless, white men, and white folks take care of their own. Local stores collected \$10,000 dollars in countertop jars for the two self-confessed kidnapers and alleged murderers. Every lawyer in the county joined their defense team, working pro-bono. The trial was to be held in Sumner, Mississippi.

But the black press countered by relentlessly covering the story, which was eventually picked up by the national press, and the atrocity spread across the country as Americans, both white and black, turned their attention to the gruesome funeral pictures:

Google Images: Emmett Till funeral.

TRIAL OR TRAVESTY:
BORED ALREADY

Since before the Civil War, there have been few states that have fought so virulently for the political philosophy of “States Rights” as has the state of Mississippi. Long dubbed “the most southern place on earth”, Mississippi was resentful (a gross understatement) of what it considered external interference in any and all of its affairs, particularly when it came to segregation and civil rights.

After all, it was Paul Burney Johnson Jr. who, as late as 1963, ran for governor on the slogan “*Stand Tall With Paul*” . This was a reference to him physically blocking James Meredith’s entry onto the campus of Ole Miss during the famous stand off where the Feds had ruled that this black man clearly had a right to a university education. But Mississippi--and Paul Burney Johnson Jr.--felt otherwise. Johnson also publicly stated often during his 1963 gubernatorial campaign that “***N.A.A.C.P stood for Niggers, Apes, Alligators, Coons, and Possums.***” Paul Burney Johnson Jr. won that election, by the way.

(Interesting detail: as I was finishing this book, it seems that some students at Ol’ Miss thought it would be really funny to hang a noose around the neck of the statue of James Meredith that was erected on campus to commemorate this great event in the history of integration and civil rights. In 2014. Like the man says, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” Then again, it is the Great State of Mississippi

Then again, we can’t blame the Great State of Mississippi for everything. It was only last year, in 2013, that students at Wilcox County High School in Georgia bucked 40 years of tradition by hosting their own racially integrated prom. 2013, and integration is still being heralded as an exciting new idea/controversial move. I just don’t know what comment to make about these two all-too-recent anecdotes.)

But back to Emmett Till’s story, and its background.

Mississippi resented, in particular, interference by Northerners and the NAACP. It was commonplace in the state of Mississippi that crimes committed by whites against blacks went unpunished. In fact, most went entirely unnoticed. And for a long time, the national media largely ignored these flagrant injustices, just as it ignored the thousands of lynchings that took place over three centuries of history in America's South.

So America's reaction to the Emmett Till murder came as a shock to the state of Mississippi, and particularly to the sleepy towns of Money and Sumner. The Great State of Mississippi was not at all pleased with the international spotlight being shined upon it, for it seemed that the entire world was horrified and outraged at the Emmett Till murder--and equally fascinated by the trial.

Make no mistake: The citizens of Money and Sumner had tainted the reputation of the entire United States of America, among the civilized countries of the world. The Associated Press had fielded a barrage of inquiries from Paris, Copenhagen, Tokyo--the world writ large. Quite simply, the Till case had become a major news story all around the world. It was America's litmus test: we had fought a war to end slavery, enacted all kinds of civil rights legislation, even added amendments to the Constitution.

But it was this trial that would prove to the world just how sincere the United States of America truly was, when it came to equal rights, freedom, and justice for all.

But the proud folks of Sumner just could not grasp what all the fuss was about. Days before the trial, with Emmett's body barely cold in the ground, the following indifferent headline appeared in the Sumner, Mississippi newspaper, with equally callous text printed below it:

Sumner Folks already bored with all this ruckus! ***ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, THEY SAY!***

"The people of this tiny Delta town are waiting to return to their normal way of life with a stoic patience that must come only after much practice of the art of waiting...The question heard most often from the shade of the oaks on these steps of this 45 year old building of justice: 'How come these blankety blank newspapers are making all this fuss?' "

Newspaper excerpt, 2005 documentary

Then, as far as the citizens of Money, Sumner, and Tallahatchie County in general were concerned, matters got even worse: word got around that the uppity woman from Chicago, Emmett Till's mother, who had shocked the world with those open casket photographs of her dead son, was actually coming down to Sumner, to attend the trial!

Decades later, Mamie Till would still speak with a tremor in her voice about the hate mail which poured in:

“...When that message made headlines, people began to send me mail by the bushel. Dirty pictures, pictures of male organs on the newspapers they were sending me, and sometimes it was very difficult to read the article ...they would write different stuff on top of the print, such as bombing my house and Mayor Dailey’s house if I attended that trial, and my son ‘got just what he deserved’, and ‘there is another nigger gone.’ ”

--Mamie Till, 2005

SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY

Days later, when Mamie Till arrived in Mississippi, her reception was cold and threatening. On September 19th, 1955, less than three weeks after Emmett Till’s body had been found, the trial opened. When the day of the trial came, and Mamie Till bravely took her place at the podium in front of reporters, the local southern press could not have been more hostile in its cross examination of her. It was almost as though she was one of the accused:

REPORTER: “What do you intend to do here today?”

MAMIE TILL: “To answer any questions that the attorneys might ask me to answer.”

REPORTER: “How do you think you could possibly be of help to them?”

MAMIE TILL: “I don’t know, just by answering whatever questions that they ask me.”

REPORTER: “Do you have any evidence bearing on this case?”

MAMIE TILL: “I do know that this is my son!”

And then, when Mamie Till made the long walk up the courthouse steps to take her place among the witnesses for the prosecution, she was subjected to even crueller insults. She later recalled with a still palpable fear how she was treated at the trial of the men who murdered her son:

“I remember the first day of the trial, every window was filled with a father and his son or sons, and as I would come up the steps, they would aim the guns, right at me, and they would pull the triggers and the little caps would pop and they would say ‘pop pop pop pop!’ And the fathers, they thought this was the cutest thing, and the little guys were just firing away, and you know, the hair on my neck and down my back was just standing straight up. It was a frightening experience.”

--Mamie Till, 2005

Not surprisingly, the courtroom was packed with both local citizens and reporters from all over the United States, and Sheriff Strider was his good ol' self when it came to greeting out-of-towners: Sheriff Strider consigned black reporters to a small card table on the sidelines. Strider greeted them when he passed with a cheery **"Hello Niggers!"** This became a daily ritual in the courtroom between Strider and his black guests.

U.S. Representative Charles C. Diggs Jr. of Michigan also came to the trial, to support Mamie Till. Upon learning that this Afro-American Congressman had arrived to witness the trial first hand, James Hicks, a reporter for the National Negro Press Association, headed for the bench to secure Representative Diggs a place in the courtroom. A deputy stopped him with a "not so fast" demeanor, and demanded to know why he wanted a seat up front. The reporter Hicks explained.

Then, the first deputy called a second, to whom he said, **"This nigger said there's a nigger outside who says he's a Congressman!"**

"A nigger Congressman?" the second deputy asked incredulously, before bursting into laughter. The deputies summoned their boss, Sheriff Strider, who told Hicks, **"I'll bring him in here, but I'm going to sit him at the niggers' table."**

It was hot as hell in that courtroom--perhaps a foreshadowing of what was in store down the road for Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam--and a jury was quickly convened. Not surprisingly, the jury was composed of all white men.

In a darkly humorous twist of fate, the prosecution was quick to dismiss any potential juror who knew Bryant or Milam, lest such jury members be tempted to vote for acquittal, while in hindsight, when the trial was over, it came out that almost everybody who knew the Bryant-Milam clan (for they were half brothers), generally and unilaterally hated them, so a jury full of people who knew the brothers might actually have helped Emmett Till's cause.

THE DEFENSE GANGS UP ON A GRIEVING MOTHER:

Without going through the entire transcript of the trial here, suffice it to say that the two defendants--Roy Bryant, husband of the woman in the general store, and J.W. Milam, Bryant's half brother--both ADMITTED to kidnapping Emmett Till. (There were too many witnesses for any plausible denial.) But the defendants' angle was to insist that they had just roughed up Emmett Till and then let him go free.

The crux of their argument was even more unconscionable, and will be revealed

shortly.

As for Mamie Till, she testified that the body she had examined and buried was indeed her son. It was during cross examination that the true ugliness of the defense's strategy emerged. Milam's and Bryant's attorneys assaulted Mamie Till mercilessly with hostile questions, and then presented the main argument for the defense:

The corpse pulled from the Tallahatchie River was *not* Emmett Till!

As Mamie Till would recount after the trial, ***“They summed up by saying ‘Isn’t it true that you and the NAACP got your heads together and you came down here, and with their help you all dug up a body, and you have claimed that body to be your son. But isn’t it true that your son is in Detroit, Michigan with his grandfather right now?’”***

--Mamie Till, 2003

Matters got worse still. The evil Sheriff Strider testified that the body pulled from the river was a white man, not a black man (such was the extent of decomposition), and that the body had been stolen by a gang of blacks with the plan to profit from the scheme. In a cruel twist of logic, it was further stated on the witness stand that the body was so decomposed (so decomposed that it could not be positively identified as Emmett Till), that the only way it could have been in such a state was for it to have been in the water a lot longer than three days--for Emmett Till had been dumped just 72 hours before he was found and examined by the local coroner. And as for the pinkie ring, the ring which was all that remained of Emmett Till's father, the ring that Emmett's great uncle, Mose Wright, used to identify the corpse--why, these scheming darkies could easily have slipped that ring on the corpse's finger before officials could get a look at the body.

And why this elaborate plot, according to Roy and J.W.'s attorneys, on the part of these black hoodlums? It was one of the oldest gambits in the world, claimed the defense: profit on death insurance.

Mamie Till later expressed her rage at how she was treated on the stand:

“What they accused me of was unconscionable. They tried to make me confess that I had conspired with others to get double indemnity on Emmett's five cent and ten cent insurance policies.”

--Mamie Till, 2005

But in terms of high drama during the Emmett Till trial--a trial which was being watched by the entire world--there can be no doubt that the two most dramatic and historically noteworthy moments of the trial came with the damning testimony of two black men, one of whom was a surprise witness for the prosecution. It may be difficult for us to grasp this in present times, but in testifying against alleged murderers Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, these two brave witnesses were in essence signing their own

death warrants.

But testify they did.

The first black to testify was Mose Wright, Emmett's great uncle, who had been there on the night that Emmett Till was taken by gunpoint from the house, never to return. When asked by the prosecution if he could identify the man who took his nephew, Mose stood up from his chair, "***straight as an arrow,***" dramatically pointed across the courtroom at J.W. Milam, stared at him with steely, unblinking eyes, and stated in a strong, unwavering voice, "***THAR HE.***" Even veteran reporters who had covered the Bruno Hauptman trial and other equally sensational events said they had never seen anything as brave and spellbinding as this brief but damning testimony.

As an odd footnote to history, one black photographer, Ernest Withers, covertly broke the rule that there were to be no pictures taken while trial was in session. Yet so iconic was the photo, one can only be secretly glad that the rule was broken. One need only Google Images Mose Wright to see the infamous pointing finger that represents one of the bravest moments in the history of the struggle for civil rights in this country.

(In a gross miscarriage of justice, there were two other Afro-American witnesses who could have and should have testified, but did not: two bullied black boys who were alleged to be in the truck with Milam and Bryant, helping to restrain poor Emmett, had been secreted away by Sheriff Strider, hidden away in a distant jail cell, and could be found by nobody who might have found their eyewitness testimony useful.)

But the second black witness who did take the stand and bravely managed to testify was the prosecution's surprise witness. And it was only ***after*** northern reporters and representatives from the NAACP (who could see how badly the trial was going for the prosecution), went out on their own looking for witnesses, that this surprise witness emerged from the shadows.

Willie Reed, the nineteen year old son of a sharecropper, had witnessed something on that dark night. And terrified though he was, they were able to persuade him to testify. For it was this young man who happened to be at the farm where stood the barn to which Bryant and Milam took Emmett, for the purpose of pistol whipping him within inches of his life.

And Willie Reed testified to the horrific things which he had heard that night. He swore that it was indeed J.W. Milam who he had seen around the barn, then he heard two men beating someone under a tarp: Willie testified to the agonized howls of a young boy screaming "***Mama, God have mercy, God have mercy!***"

It was said that you could hear the blood of all the white men in the courtroom boiling in their veins, as these two black witnesses had the audacity to testify these damning recollections to the jury ... and for the whole world to hear. Not surprisingly, both black defendants did not stay in Sumner long enough to be victims of the Klan's rage, which no doubt would have been visited upon them.

Moments after his testimony, Willie Reed was spirited away from the courthouse, out of Sumner, and taken away north to Chicago. There he promptly suffered a nervous breakdown. However, the same strength which imbued his testimony no doubt imbued his spirit; he went on to live a long life, and to be a part of both the PBS Documentary and the Beauchamp film in 2005. He has about him the glint and steely strength of a man who has done the right thing in the face of dire danger, and lived to tell about it.

Mose Wright, the great uncle of Emmett Till, would have a story of his own to tell, in years to come.

He went back to his house--the home from which Emmett was abducted on that terrible night--with the intention of staying just long enough to bring in his cotton crop. Surely he must have been desperate for the money this was going to bring, so that he could relocate his life. (His wife had already left town, to the safety of Chicago.) But the night after he testified, he woke up from a dream, a kind of a warning as he would later describe it, and he spent the long night driving around in his truck, finally ending up in the parking lot of his church. He stayed there till dawn.

Only the next morning did he find out from a neighbor that a pack of white men had been nosing around his property all night, shining flashlights in windows, perhaps entering unlocked windows and doors. There can be no doubt that Mose Wright's punishment for his courageous testimony would have been just as sadistic as Emmett Till's fate, had he stayed in his home that night.

Mose Wright packed a suitcase, got on a train, went north, and never looked back.

The trial took just five days.

In his closing speech, the lead defense attorney warned members of the jury that their ancestors would turn over in their graves if Milam and Bryant were found guilty: ***“Every last Anglo Saxon one of you has the courage to free these men.”***

Reporters overheard jury members laughing and joking from behind closed doors. Did I mention that several of the jury members were drinking beer throughout the trial?

And even in spite of all the aforementioned admissions and testimony, all of the evidence notwithstanding, Milam and Bryant were acquitted.

After 67 minutes of deliberation.

One jury member joked, ***“It wouldn't have taken us that long if we hadn't all stopped for a bottle of pop.”***

Outside, guns were fired into the air, once the jury's decision was announced: Bryant and Milam were free. An ebullient Sheriff Strider was smug about the outcome: ***“I hope the Chicago niggers and the NAACP are satisfied.”***

EMMETT TILL

by James A. Emaneul

I hear a whistling
Through the water.
Little Emmett
Won't be still.
He keeps floating
Round the darkness,
Edging through
The silent chill.
Tell me, please,
That bedtime story
Of the fairy
River Boy
Who swims forever,
Deep in treasures,
Necklaced in
A coral toy.

A WREATH FOR EMMETT TILL

By Marilyn Nelson

Rosemary for remembrance, Shakespeare wrote.
If I could forget, believe me, I would.
Pierced by the screams of a shortened childhood.

Emmett Till's name still catches in my throat.
Mamie's one child, a boy thrown to bloat,
Mutilated boy martyr. If I could
Erase the memory of Emmett's victimhood,
The memory of monsters...That bleak thought
Tears through the patchwork drapery of dreams.

Let me gather spring flowers for a wreath:

Trillium, apple blossoms, Queen Anne's lace,
Indian pipe, bloodrot, white as moonbeams,
Like the full moon, which smiled calmly on his death,

Like his gouged eye, which watched boots kick his face.

Pierced by the screams of a shortened childhood,
my heartwood has been scarred for fifty years
by what I heard, with hundreds of green ears.
That jackal laughter. Two hundred years I stood
listening to small struggles to find food,
to the songs of creature life, which disappears
and comes again, to the music of the spheres.
Two hundred years of deaths I understood.
Then slaughter axed one quiet summer night,
shivering the deep silence of the stars.
A running boy, five men in close pursuit.
One dark, five pale faces in the moonlight.
Noise, silence, back-slaps. One match, five cigars.
Emmett Till's name still catches in the throat.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MISSISSIPPI BURNING

"Justitia Patiens Est"

"If it is necessary that every Negro in the state will be lynched, it will be done to maintain White Supremacy."

*-James K. Vardaman
Governor of Mississippi from 1904-1908,
and served in the United States Senate from 1913 to 1919.*

With a legacy such as that of Senator Vardaman, and with a man of such august gravitas sanctioning outright genocide, is it any surprise that the following bit of ribald humor shows up every year in assorted hunting supply stores, camping grounds, and good ol' boy cyber sites?

Nigger Hunting Season

State of Mississippi
Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Parks
Jackson, Mississippi
(601) 555-0000

PROCLAMATION

RE: Nigger Hunting Season hunting fees: Free to first 7,683 hunters/\$1.00 thereon.

Dear Mississippi Hunters:

The 2011 Big Game hunting season in the state of Mississippi has been canceled due to shortages of Deer, Turkey, Elk and Antelope. However, this does not mean there will be no hunting. In the place of the big game animals this year we will have open season on Niggers. This will entail the hunting of America's most worthless residents, commonly known as "Niggers, Spooks, Coons, Jungle Bunnies, Spear Chuckers, and Boons" The year 2011 will be an open season, as the niggers must be thinned out every two to three years. Hunting will be allowed 24 hours a day, however niggers are largely nocturnal and

may be asleep in the daylight hours.

IT WILL BE UNLAWFUL TO:

- * Hunt in a party of more than 150 persons.
- * Use more than 35 bloodthirsty hounds.
- * Shoot in a public tavern (Bullet may ricochet and hit a white person).
- * Shoot a Nigger sleeping on the sidewalk (possible ricochet)

TRAPPING REGULATIONS

- * Traps may not be set within 15 feet of a liquor store.
- * Traps may not be baited with KFC, Watermelon, or Jenkum.
- * All traps must have at least 120 lb. spring strength and have a jaw spread of at least 5'3".

LEGAL WEAPONS

- * Knife.
- * Spear.
- * Steel Traps.
- * Snares.
- * Bow and Arrow.
- * Crossbow.
- * Handguns.
- * Rifles.
- * Shotguns.
- * Machine Guns.
- * Silencers.
- * Night Vision scopes.
- * There are no prohibited weapons at this time.

OTHER RULES AND REGULATIONS

- * Shooting length-wise in a welfare line is prohibited.
- * It will be unlawful to possess a road-kill nigger, however, special road-kill permits shall be issued to people with semi-tractor trailers and one-ton pickup trucks.
 - * With such a permit you may bait the highway with food stamps, KFC, Watermelon, and coal burners.
 - * Wanton waste laws do not apply.

HOW TO KNOW WHEN NIGGERS ARE IN YOUR AREA

- * Chicken Bones and Watermelon Rinds litter the street.

- * Nigger wool in high branches
 - * Sickening smell, like a mixture of feces, body odor, and rancid grease.
 - * Large lines in front of the welfare office and for food stamps.
 - * Trails of empty jenlum bottles leading from the city parks to all city alleys.
 - * Empty books of food stamps thrown all over.
 - * Car-loads of niglets waiting outside liquor stores.
 - * Unintelligible eeking and ooking at all hours.
- REMEMBER LIMIT IS TEN (10) PER DAY.
 POSSESSION LIMIT: FORTY (40).
 GOOD HUNTING!

“There is no use to equivocate or lie about the matter. Mississippi's constitutional convention was held for no other purpose than to eliminate the nigger from politics ... Let the world know it just as it is.”

***--James K. Vardaman,
 Mississippi Governor and Senator, noted above***

“I call on every red-blooded white man to use any means to keep the niggers away from the polls. If you don't understand what that means you are just plain dumb.”

***--Theodore G. Bilbo, Governor of Mississippi 1916-1920, and 1928-1932;
 Served in the United States Senate from 1935-1947.***

“Old Lady Roosevelt ... forced our Southern girls to use the stools and the toilets of damn syphilitic nigger women.”

--Also Theodore Bilbo

MISSISSIPPI, MURDERS, AND MARTYRS

James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael “Mickey” Schwerner.

Icons of the sixties.

But before they became icons, they were just three civil rights workers trying to bring voting rights to the South. And because we have chosen to open this chapter with a glimpse into Mississippi's early political rhetoric regarding voting and integration, you

now know the kind of atmosphere they were driving into, during that tense, hot, Neshoba summer.

Make no mistake, most of those men responsible for leading the great state of Mississippi--presumably the state's best and brightest--were at their most lethal, vicious, and depraved when it came to the matter of the Negro being allowed to vote.

(In defense of the Bayou State, the events of this chapter happened a full half a century ago. Since that time, the state is populated with political leaders whose courage and determination has been integral to ushering in a new wave of civil rights, and, as we will see at the end of this chapter, justice for the victims.)

You might say that this particular nightmare began in 1961, when James Meredith, a black man, attempted to become a student at the University of Mississippi. Meredith had to fight long and hard for his civil rights. In brief: after being rejected summarily by the University itself, Meredith filed the appropriate federal papers, assorted federal agencies got involved, and Meredith triumphantly gained his admission. It required President Kennedy mobilizing some 31,000 federal troops to achieve the historic moment of matriculation, but that victory for civil rights did come to pass.

But Meredith's triumph, achieved by using federal laws pitted against state attitudes, also fomented a new wave of hatred from Mississippians against all those civil rights workers who would dare encroach or descend from the North.

A strong new branch of the Ku Klux Klan grew out of the Meredith incident. Soon there were rampant rumors about the impending Freedom Rides from the north, bringing with them plans to register Negro voters for the 1964 election. Stories flew about the state claiming that Mississippi could expect some "30,000 or more troublemakers" to come flooding into their state.

With this dreadful news, a brand new branch of the KKK swelled to an estimated 10,000 eager members. And it was one of the strongest, largest, and angriest groups of white supremacists that the South had seen since the Civil War.

Masterminding the Conspiracy

The killing of the three civil rights workers was certainly a drama, the stuff of grand theatre, so here, unlike the other chapters, we will include the cast--the Villains, that is.

The truth is, the story of the murders is so well known and has been so well portrayed in a variety of dramatic venues (the films "Mississippi Burning", "Murder in Mississippi", and the documentary "Neshoba: The Price of Freedom" among others), that my goal is not to recreate the entire tragic national nightmare here. Rather, I choose to emphasize some of those points which contribute to the larger pattern for which we have

been searching: an on-going Klan presence in parts of the South, the presence of those elements necessary for a hate crime to occur, an absolute hatred for blacks, Jews, gays--essentially, anyone who constitutes "The Other," and how justice is frequently, even predictably, aborted when it comes to holding the vigilantes accountable.

After I wrote the first draft of this chapter, I reviewed it and found the prose frankly rather banal, knowing that other renditions of the incident (three powerful films, for example) had been rendered far more compellingly than could a few factual pages in the chapter of a book. But when I revisited the information in an attempt to "humanize" it, if you will, to bring the story back to life for a new audience, a younger audience perhaps, ***I was stunned by the sheer volume of people involved.***

This was not a couple of drunken racists with a gun, as we saw in the tragic case of Emmett Till. This was not even a handful of angry bigots in a bar. This cast reads like a Tolstoy novel.

And so, just to show the extent to which the Mississippi white supremacists were willing to go to shut down black voter registration, here is the cast of Villains. Not surprisingly, almost all of them were in the Ku Klux Klan, and the list is so long that you may have trouble keeping track of them. What you will notice is that they almost all seem to be dull, inconsequential, many of them with only minor criminal records. Only with the force of numbers, and with the anonymity of the infamous Klan hood, do they gain any iota of significance or power. Yet even then, they remain nothing more than evil butchers, bullies who murder in the dark of night.

As you read the list, I would also ask you to please remember the most important facts of the case:

- 1.) The state of Mississippi refused to charge any of them with murder (or homicide, or manslaughter, or even assault), even when there were three decomposing bodies laid out for all the world to see.

- 2.) The second ugly fact you need to know is that the mastermind of the entire conspiracy walked away scot-free; the jury simply would not vote to convict, all evidence of his guilt notwithstanding. He was, after all, a Baptist Preacher.

So whether they were part of the misinformation trail or helped in hiding the bodies, whether they pulled the trigger or castrated a black man, they are all here for your consideration--

THE LYNCH MOB:

1. The Sheriff Lawrence A. Rainey. Rainey denied he was ever part of the conspiracy, but Rainey was accused of ignoring a vast range of crimes and offenses

related to the murders. Even prior to his participation in the cover-up, Rainey had been accused of murdering of several black Americans, and was a known member of the KKK. At the time of the murders, the thirty-seven-year-old Rainey insisted that he was visiting his sick wife in the hospital, and later home with his family watching “Bonanza.” As events unfolded, Rainey became emboldened with his newly found popularity in the Philadelphia, Mississippi community. He was smiling, smug, and cocksure for the cameras.

2. Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price: Before his friend Rainey was elected Sheriff in 1963, Price had no previous experience in law enforcement, having worked as a salesman and a bouncer. The twenty-six-year-old Price was the only person who witnessed the entire event which came to be known as “Mississippi Burning.” He arrested the three civil rights workers on bogus charges, fed them an excellent home-cooked meal, released them, then immediately chased them down State Highway 19 towards Meridian, eventually re-capturing them at the intersection near House, Mississippi. Price and a gang of Klansmen then “escorted” them north along Highway 19 to Rock Cut Road, where the three civil rights workers would be killed. Their initial arrest by Deputy Price was simply for the purposes of detaining the three men long enough so that the Klan could gather sub rosa and make the final arrangements for the murders.

3. Fifty-year-old Bernard Akins had a mobile home business which he operated out of Meridian; he was a member of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. It was at a secret meeting at Akins’ mobile home park that the Reverend Edgar Jay Killen met with James Jordan, Alton Wayne Roberts, Jimmie Snowden, and Bernard Akins. This meeting took place during the time that the three civil rights workers were sitting in jail on false charges.

4. Jimmy K. Arledge, twenty-seven, was a Meridian commercial driver and a high school drop out. It was Arledge who was given the responsibility of getting rid of the CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) station wagon when they kidnapped the three civil rights workers, and removing it from Highway 492, where it surely would have drawn attention, then dumping it on Rock Cut Road.

5. Horace Barnette, twenty-five, drove one of the two Klan cars following Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price during the chase that ended in the murders. He was very proud of his 1957 two-toned blue Ford Fairlane.

6. White Knights Imperial Wizard Samuel H. Bowers, who served with the U.S. Navy during World War II, is credited with saying **“This is a war between the Klan and the FBI. And in a war there have to be some who suffer.”** Bowers, like the Reverend Killen, was one of the masterminds. He was instrumental in everything from forming this new arm of the Klan, to inspiring the lynch mob prior to the killing, to hiding the bodies of the three young victims.

7. Other N. Burkes, who usually went by the nickname of Otha, was a Philadelphia

Police officer (Philadelphia, Mississippi, that is). The seventy-one-year-old was a twenty-five year veteran on the city police force; the World War I veteran had a cruel disposition, and had a history of being particularly cruel to blacks. At the time of his December 1964 arraignment for his participation in the murders, Burkes was awaiting a previous indictment for a different civil rights case.

8. Olen L. Burrage, who was thirty-four at the time, was the owner of a trucking company. Burrage's Old Jolly Farm was the location of the infamous dam where the civil rights workers were buried. Burrage is quoted as saying ***"I got a dam big enough to hold a hundred of 'em."***

9. Frank J. Herndon, forty-six, was the operator of a Meridian drive-in called the "Longhorn." He was the Exalted Grand Cyclops of the Meridian White Knights. He rode along with the posse of murderers.

10. James T. Harris, also known as Pete, was a White Knights Investigator. The Klan was extremely concerned with the impending flood of Freedom Riders that summer, and Harris was in charge of monitoring persons coming over the state line. The thirty-year old would keep track of the three civil rights workers' every move.

11. James Jordan, thirty-eight years old, took pleasure in killing "the Negro Chaney." Jordan confessed his crimes to the federal authorities in exchange for a plea deal.

12. Billy W. Posey, twenty-eight years old, was one of the drivers in the lynch mob. He was an automobile mechanic, proud of his 1958 red and white Chevrolet. The car was considered fast and was chosen over Jerry Sharpe's for the pursuit of the civil rights workers. It was Posey who informed mastermind Reverend Killen that the three civil rights workers had been arrested by Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price. It was also at Posey's garage that Burrage, Posy, and Tucker would meet to discuss the burial details--in the infamous earthen damn on Burrage's property.

13. Alton W. Roberts, twenty-six, was a dishonorably discharged U.S. Marine who worked as a salesman in Meridian. Roberts, standing at 6 feet 3 inches and weighing in at 225 pounds was a formidable foe and renowned for his short temper. Leader of the lynch mob. He liked discharging his weapon, and did not mind the lack of challenge presented by shooting someone at close range, as he would prove during that infamous night. He murdered Goodman and Schwermer.

14. Jerry M. Sharpe, twenty-one, ran a wood pulp supply house. Part of the lynch mob, he was in Posey's car, which was following Deputy Cecil Price, who was tailing the civil rights workers.

15. Jimmy Snowden, thirty-one, was a Meridian commercial driver and a U.S. Army veteran, and he was present during the murders.

16. Jimmy L. Townsend, only seventeen years old, was the youngest of the killers; he left high school in 1964 to work at Posey's Phillips 66 Garage. Part of the lynch mob, he was in Posey's car, which was following Deputy Cecil Price, who was tailing the civil

rights workers

17. Herman Tucker lived in Hope, Mississippi, just a few miles from the Neshoba County Fair Grounds. Tucker, thirty-six, was not a member of the KKK, but he was a building contractor who worked for Burrage. Tucker, along with Arledge, was tasked by the White Knights with the disposing of the CORE station wagon.

18. Oliver R. Warner, known as Pops, was a Meridian grocery store owner. Warner, fifty-four, was also a member of the White Knights.

Here ends the list of Villains. And those are just the ones we know about.

Now begins the tragic story:

A SECRET MEETING OF THE KLAN

(Is there any other kind?)

LOCATION: Somewhere on the outskirts of Raleigh, Mississippi.

DATE: Sunday June 7th, just two weeks before the murders.

Airplanes piloted by Klansmen circled above to keep a watchful eye on the surrounding area as nearly three hundred White Knights clandestinely met. White Knights Imperial Wizard Sam Bowers addressed the White Knights about the **“Nigger-Communist invasion of Mississippi”** to take place in a few weeks. The Klansmen listened as Bowers issued a stern warning: **“This summer the enemy will launch his final push for victory in Mississippi ... there must be a secondary group of our members, standing back from the main area of conflict, armed and ready to move. It must be an extremely swift, extremely violent, hit-and-run group.”**

The KKK members at this secret meeting were a select group; they constituted the elite core of particularly virulent white supremacists. The entire branch was over 10,000 members strong, and they were constantly on the watch for troublemakers. And because they were inextricably bound up with local law enforcement, monitoring “troublemakers” was easy to do.

James Earl Chaney (black), Andrew Goodman, and Michael “Mickey” Schwerner (both white), were precisely the kind of troublemakers that the Klan did not want coming into “their” South. The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission was strongly opposed to integration and civil rights. It paid spies to identify citizens suspected of activism, especially Northerners who entered the state.

The records that would be opened by court order decades later in 1998 also revealed the state's deep complicity in the murders of these three martyred civil rights workers, because KKK member **“A. L. Hopkins had passed on information about the arrival of**

the workers, including the car license plate number of some new civil rights workers.”

This very particular information was put into the hands of nobody less than the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. Records revealed that the Commission passed the information on to the Sheriff of Neshoba County, who was implicated in the murders.

THE KLAN'S DEADLY PLANS

On Memorial Day in 1964, two of the civil rights workers, Mickey Schwerner and James Earl Chaney, spoke to the black congregation at Mount Zion Methodist Church in Longdale, Mississippi. It was a rousing speech about setting up a Freedom School. Schwerner implored them to register to vote, saying ***“you have been slaves too long, we can help you help yourselves ...”***

The White Knights learned of the voting drive and set in motion a plot to hinder the civil rights workers' progress and ultimately destroy their efforts. The White Knights wanted to lure the civil rights workers into the heart of Neshoba County, and Mount Zion Methodist Church, where the workers had just spoken, seemed to be the perfect bait.

One night after a routine church business meeting, members leaving the church were ambushed by the Klan who beat them and terrorized them, even the sick and the elderly. The Klan later returned in the dead of night and burned the church to the ground. They did this not only for the sheer joy of its malice, but knowing that the act of arson would lure the three civil rights workers back to the site, into an ambush.

On June 21, 1964, after hearing about the attack on the church, Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner all planned to meet at the Meridian voting rights headquarters; then they would leave for Longdale, Mississippi to investigate the destruction of the Mount Zion Church. Schwerner told his colleagues at the headquarters in Meridian to search for them if they did not return by 4:00 pm; he said ***“if we're not back by then, start trying to locate us.”***

THE ARRESTS, STALKINGS AND MURDER

While returning to Meridian, the three men were stopped and arrested by Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price for allegedly driving 35 miles over the 30-mile-per-hour speed limit. It is highly doubtful, given the civil rights workers' knowledge of southern law enforcement and its issues with northern interlopers, that there was any truth or accuracy

to this charge. The trio was taken to the jail in Neshoba County where Chaney was booked for speeding, while Schwerner and Goodman were booked "for investigation". Their captors spared no kindness: it was a Sunday, and as was her Sabbath ritual, Minnie Herring, wife of the jailer, cooked them a special home-cooked meal of chicken, mashed potatoes, and all the fixings ... eerily reminiscent of a condemned man's last meal. After Chaney was fined \$20, the three men were released and told to leave the county.

And Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price was back on their tail the entire time. It turned into a high speed chase, as the three men realized what was surely about to happen to them--although they could not know that behind Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price's squad car, there were already two carloads of Klansmen following them, a bloodthirsty lynch mob ready for vigilante justice. They were all drinking heavily, fighting over who would get to do the actual killings.

History will remain forever murky as to why the three civil rights workers agreed to pull over when the deputy attempted to pull them over once again. Perhaps they thought they could reason with the deputy, or perhaps they thought it would go worse for them if they continued to flee, and then were caught.

But their fate had been sealed. As soon as they pulled over, not only Deputy Price, but cars full of Klansmen were upon them. The three men were shot in cold blood. Chaney, being black, was beaten almost to death before James Jordan put a bullet in him.

After the three men were shot, their bodies were quickly relocated to Olen Burrage's Old Jolly Farm dam, located along Highway 21, just a few miles southwest of Philadelphia. Herman Tucker was at the dam waiting for the arrival of the lynch mob. Tucker was a heavy machinery operator, and covered up the bodies using a bulldozer that he owned.

After the bodies were buried, Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price told the group:

“Well, boys, you've done a good job. You've struck a blow for the white man. Mississippi can be proud of you. You've let those agitating outsiders know where this state stands. Go home now and forget it. But before you go, I'm looking each one of you in the eye and telling you this: The first man who talks is dead! If anybody who knows anything about this ever opens his mouth to any outsider about it, then the rest of us are going to kill him just as dead as we killed those three sons of bitches tonight. Does everybody understand what I'm saying? The man who talks is dead, dead, dead!”

THE INVESTIGATION

When Mickey Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman went missing in

Mississippi on June 21, 1964, United States Senator James Eastland reportedly told President Lyndon Johnson that the incident was a hoax and there was no Ku Klux Klan in the state, surmising that the three had gone to Chicago (although he later suggested Cuba):

Johnson: Jim, we've got three kids missing down there. What can I do about it?

Eastland: Well, I don't know. I don't believe there's ... I don't believe there's three missing.

Johnson: We've got their parents down here.

Eastland: I believe it's a publicity stunt...

James Oliver Eastland,
United States Senator, 1947-1948

But nobody was believing Eastland, and nobody was giving Johnson any peace. He didn't need this tragedy in the national spotlight, not with Vietnam escalating. The federal government got very involved, with the Federal Bureau of Investigation leading the charge.

But the folks of Mississippi could not have been more apathetic. Officials had no intention of prosecuting the men involved in the murders, most likely because those involved in the murders were, well--the officials.

In the view of Mississippians, the three civil rights workers got exactly what they deserved. And they were open about their opinions:

"I believe them jokers planned this and they're sitting up in New York city laughing at us Mississippi folk."

--Female citizen, interviewed by reporter

"It's pitiful that parents haven't trained their children the way they should have. They ought to stay at home and work, they ought to stay at home and tend to their own business."

--Reverend Edgar Ray Killen

"Well I believe it's a big publicity hoax, but if they're dead, I feel like they asked for it."

--Female citizen interview by reporter

For a while, the trail went cold. But when the FBI offered a \$25,000 reward for news of the civil rights workers' whereabouts, a break came in the case. After paying at least one participant in the crime for details, the FBI found the civil rights workers' bodies in

the Burrage Old Jolly Farm dam on August 4, 1964.

“They were warned to get the hell out but they didn’t do it, so they wound up out there in an earthen dam. Damn good place for them, (citizen laughs), that’s my opinion on it!”

--Male citizen interviewed by reporter

Appallingly enough, the stubborn Mississippi officials, even up to the highest ranking in the state, refused to prosecute the killers for murder. But murder was “a state crime”. And so it was left to the United States Department of Justice to charge 18 individuals under the 1870 U.S. Force Act with conspiring to deprive the three of their civil rights (by murder).

How bizarre but brilliant was this turn of justice? Because surely, if you murder someone, you are depriving them of their civil rights? The Feds had triumphed over the Mississippi Klan.

It took three years, but some degree of justice was served. Those indicted included Sheriff Rainey, Deputy Sheriff Price and 16 other men.

Those found guilty on October 20, 1967, were Cecil Price, Klan Imperial Wizard Samuel Bowers, Alton Wayne Roberts, Jimmy Snowden, Billey Wayne Posey, Horace Barnett, and Jimmy Arledge.

Sentences ranged from 3 to 10 years. Appallingly light sentences, a mere slap on the wrist for killers who took vicious delight in the torture and murder of three young men. But Judge William Harold Cox was a good ol’ boy from Mississippi. About his sentencing decisions, he said: ***“They killed one nigger, one Jew, and a white man—I gave them all what I thought they deserved.”***

And the citizens of Mississippi remained as cynical as ever:

“Well, you have exceptionally good black people here and then you have what we describe as niggers down here. I would just mostly consider the crowd that came down here as trash and they agitated every way in the world they could. I was always taught that if you go looking for trouble, not only will you find it, you’re supposed to find it, and they found it.”

--J. K.Chenry, Neshoba County Native

“God forgives murder and he forgives adultery. But he is very angry, and he actually curses all those who do integrate!”

--Female citizen interviewed about the incident

After finally exhausting all of their appeals, the seven began serving their sentences

in March of 1970.

None served more than six years.

Sheriff Rainey was among those acquitted.

Two of the defendants, E.G. Barnett, a candidate for sheriff, and Edgar Ray Killen, a local minister, had been strongly implicated in the murders by witnesses, but the jury came to a deadlock on their charges, and the Federal prosecutor decided not to retry them. One of the jurors later commented that in the matter of Klansman Ray Killen, the true mastermind behind the three murders, "***she could never vote to convict a preacher.***"

There is an intriguing and grisly side note, all but buried (no pun intended), in the headlines that swirled around the civil rights murders and their aftermath. During the investigation, searchers including Navy divers and the FBI discovered the bodies of at least nine other Mississippi blacks, whose disappearances over the past several years had not attracted attention outside of their local communities. The authorities had made virtually no effort to search for these missing persons. Given the ugly truth of Neshoba County at the time, law enforcement may actually have been the perpetrators behind the disappearances.

What did/does that say about us as a nation, that so many of us "breathed a sigh of relief" that dead bodies were found, but that they were not the bodies of two missing white men?

But just as history has taught us that the dead often can not be so easily silenced, so it also happens that the living cannot be silenced or stopped in their search for the truth...

JUSTITIA PATIENS EST

For much of the next four decades, no legal action was taken regarding the murders. It took the tireless investigative prowess of award winning journalist Jerry Mitchell, reporter for the Jackson Clarion Ledger, and surprisingly enough, a group of high school students creating a documentary, to come up with enough new evidence to pressure the federal government into opening a new trial.

Mitchell was no stranger to investigative triumphs and victories; it was his work that helped solve and secure convictions for other famous civil rights cases such as the murders of Vernon Dahmer, Medgar Evers, and the Birmingham church bombing.

And Mitchell was certainly not going to let the death of the three civil rights workers end the way that it did. Mitchell developed new evidence, found new witnesses, and

pressured the state to take action.

It was at about this time that Barry Bradford, a high school teacher at Adlai E. Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois, and three of his students, Allison Nichols, Sarah Siegel, and Brittany Saltiel, joined Mitchell's efforts. Together the student-teacher team produced a documentary for the National History Day Contest. It presented important new evidence and compelling reasons to reopen the case.

Amazingly, the young team also obtained an interview with Edgar Ray Killen (Klansman and acquitted murder mastermind, you remember), which helped convince the authorities to re-open the investigation. Partially by using evidence developed by Bradford and his intrepid students, Mitchell was able to determine the identity of "Mr. X", the mystery informer who had helped the FBI discover the bodies in 1964.

Mitchell's investigation and the high school students' work in creating Congressional pressure, along with national media attention and the taped conversation with the Reverend Killen, prompted action. In 2004, on the 40th anniversary of the murders, a brave and committed multi-ethnic group of citizens in Philadelphia, Mississippi issued a call for justice. More than 1500 people, including civil rights leaders and Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour joined them in voicing their desire to revisit the case. Again, bold moves in such a state. A proud moment for Mississippi.

“If they loved their sons, I think they would have been closer to them than they were. I cannot show the type of remorse I should for some good Christian family who would go through the same thing.”

--Ray Edgar Ray Killen, preparing to be re-tried after forty years, in response to what he now thought of the killing of the three civil rights workers, one of whom was black, and one a Jew.

On January 6th, 2005, a Neshoba County grand jury indicted Edgar Ray Killen on three counts of murder; he was described as the man who planned and directed the killing of the civil rights workers. Killen found it impossible to hide his angry shock that justice had actually caught up with him after so many decades; he knew that it was Mitchell behind this resurgence of interest:

“I haven't seen it, but I'm almost sure that that red-bearded ultra-liberal Christ-hating Jew put all that in the paper.”

On June 21st, 2005, after decades of escaping justice, a jury convicted Killen on three counts of manslaughter. Killen, then 80 years old, was sentenced to three consecutive terms of 20 years in prison. He appealed, claiming that no jury of his peers would have convicted him at the time on the evidence presented.

The Mississippi Supreme Court confirmed the guilty verdict in 2007.

Author's personal note: watching the arrogant Preacher Killen topple from his pedestal, and go down for his crimes, in the final moments of "Neshoba: The Price of Freedom" is one of the most gratifying moments I have ever seen in a documentary film.

There could be no question. "Profound" does not even adequately describe the impact of the murder of the three civil rights workers on the American people. The "Mississippi Burning" incident had transformed the country: it was at once galvanizing and polarizing. It had both energized and emboldened the civil rights movement. And it had changed the fabric of everyday life in America, forever and for all time. Proof: if only the Preacher/Klansman Ray Killen could have gazed into the political future of the United States, and seen half a century ahead in time...

Even Mr. Norman Rockwell, for decades known as the magazine illustrator who captured the most innocent of childhood moments and blissful vignettes of Americana, could no longer turn his back on what was happening in this country:

GOOGLE Norman Rockwell "Southern Justice"

GOOGLE Norman Rockwell "The Problem We All Live With"

GOOGLE Norman Rockwell "New Kids in the Neighborhood"

Or

GOOGLE "Norman Rockwell and the Civil Rights Paintings"

www.uulyrics.com/goodman-schwerner-and-chaney/

The bodies of the three civil rights workers had been discovered in the Burrage Old Jolly Farm dam on June 21st, 1964.

Twelve days later, Congress would pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

And the country would begin, ever so slowly, to heal itself.

Rest in Peace, Mickey, Andrew, and James.

GOODMAN, SCHWERNER AND CHANEY

by Tom Paxton

The night air is heavy, no cool breezes blow.
The sounds of the voices are worried and low.
Desperately wondering and desperate to know,
About Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney.

Calm desperation and flickering hope,
Reality grapples like a hand on the throat.
For you live in the shadow of ten feet of rope,
If you're Goodman and Schwerner and Chaney.

The Pearl River was dragged and two bodies were found,
But it was a blind alley for both men were brown.
So they all shrugged their shoulders and the search it went on,
For Goodman and Schwerner and Chaney.

Pull out the dead bodies from the ooze of the dam.
Take the bodies to Jackson all accordin' to plan.
With the one broken body do the best that you can,
It's the body of young James Chaney.

The nation was outraged and shocked through and through.
Call J. Edgar Hoover. He'll know what to do.
For they've murdered two white men, and a colored boy too
Goodman and Schwerner and Chaney.

James Chaney your body exploded in pain,
And the beating they gave you is pounding my brain.
And they murdered much more with their dark bloody chains
And the body of pity lies bleeding.

The pot-bellied copper shook hands all around,
And joked with the rednecks who came into town
And they swore that the murderer soon would be found
And they laughed as they spat their tobacco.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE LYNCHING OF TOE

“I believe I can fly...”

A sacred routine had been broken.

Grover Thomas, eighty-one, was sitting on his porch, watching the stream of people, black and white, bearing casseroles, baked chicken, cakes, pies, the usual fare, as they strolled into a neighbor's open front door. This was a special occasion.

But the routine had been broken.

Because every morning, that neighbor would walk up Grover's steps to the front porch with a plate of biscuits, a box of dominoes, or perhaps an offer to mow the lawn--always something friendly and selfless.

This morning ritual had been going on for decades now, since James was a boy and Grover Thomas was a much younger man. When Jimmy didn't show up on that sad morning, Grover Thomas knew that somehow, he never would again.

Nobody called him Jimmy or even James though; his friends and family playfully nicknamed him “Toe,” because of a childhood accident that had caused him to lose a toe. “Toe” was a black man, forty-nine years old, the third of eight children born to Stella, a Sunday school teacher, and James, a dry cleaner. When Toe was a boy, his family's life revolved around the Greater New Bethel Baptist Church, a few blocks from their home, where Stella taught the children and her husband was a deacon.

“When the church doors opened on Sunday, we were there,” said Mrs. Taylor, fifty-one, who teaches eighth-grade science in the Houston public schools. “There was school in the morning, then services, then Baptist Training Union, then church again at night. You knew what you'd be doing on Sundays.”

As a boy, Toe was known in church more for his passion for piano playing and singing than his faith. He could pick out any tune on the keyboard before he was ten, and was particularly adept at belting out spirituals and hymns, especially “Walk With Me, Lord,” and, more recently, the pop hit *“I Believe I Can Fly.”* He was the lead trumpeter in the band at Rowe Elementary School, and also did an excellent imitation of Al Green.

Toe--James--grew up to be a man who was proud with good reason of his three children. You could tell that though divorced, he had done something mighty right by way of being a father. His beautiful daughter Jamie was sixteen and living with her mom Lufkin, Texas, just a few miles down the road. His oldest daughter Renee was twenty-seven, serving her country in the United States Army. His son, Ross, twenty, was

an Army private stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia, with orders to deploy to South Korea.

It was a horrified local resident who found James's severed head. The police found parts of James Byrd in eighty-one other spots along that country road, in addition to what was left of his torso. The fact that so much of his body was found all over the road, and that James Byrd was alive for much of the agonizing ordeal, tells us all too much about how much this poor human being must have suffered.

The loving family described above was torn asunder when three white men, two white supremacists and one cowardly driver, picked up James Byrd, offering him a lift. Byrd knew the driver, and trusted the offer of a ride home. But instead, these three monsters took their victim to a secluded country road, beat him severely, urinated on him, sprayed black spray paint on his face, tied chains to him, and dragged him for several miles. Forensic evidence suggests that Byrd died after his right arm and head were severed when his body hit a culvert, resulting in Byrd's decapitation.

Killers John William King, Shawn Allen Berry, and Lawrence Russell Brewer dumped their victim's mutilated remains in front of an African American cemetery, and then without missing a beat, they went to a big family barbecue.

HIS FINAL MOMENTS

Excerpted from Reuters, February 23rd, 1999:

"James Byrd was alive and writhing in pain until he struck a culvert that decapitated him," an expert witness testified in the trial of white supremacist John William King. Forensic pathologist Tommy Brown said James Byrd, forty-nine years of age, "fought to survive while he was chained by his ankles to a truck and dragged more than two miles along a paved country road" in what prosecutors described as a racist gang initiation.

"He was attempting to keep his head off of the pavement. He was conscious," said Brown, who performed the official autopsy on Byrd a day after the June 7th murder. "Byrd's elbows and knees were ground to the bone as he tried to prop himself up," Brown said.

"He would have been very tired, very worn out trying to do a lot of things, trying to survive," Brown testified. "He would probably swap one portion of his body ... trying to

get pressure off other areas.”

“Byrd’s head and right arm and shoulder were torn from his torso when he struck a concrete drainage culvert as the truck swerved from side to side”, the pathologist said. “It’s my opinion that he was alive up to that point.” Brown added.

End Excerpt.

Or, to put it in the words of one participant, driver Shawn Berry said this of his two friends:

“They were having fun. They were acting like they were just having a good old time.”

Berry remembered even more details, as police questioning continued:

“Russell looked back and started laughing and said, ‘Look, he’s rolling!’ and ‘He’s bouncing around all over the place!’ And then Russell giggled hysterically.”

Shawn Allen Berry is serving life in prison; he has a daughter with a woman he married by proxy. He was the only one of the three who did not receive the death penalty, because he was not a known white supremacist. He was only the driver, and he claimed during the trial that he had no idea what King and Brewer’s real agenda was, and that when he tried to intervene, they frightened him into submission by saying, ***“The same thing can happen to a nigger lover.”***

John William King is sitting on death row. On the day he was sentenced, as he was leaving the courthouse, he was asked by a reporter if he had anything to say to the Byrd family. ***“Yeah,”*** he said, glancing at them. ***“Suck my dick.”*** In the official document, “Court of Criminal Appeals: Texas v. John William King”, we are provided with some revealing tidbits about King’s body art:

“Among the tattoos covering the appellant’s body were a woodpecker in a Ku Klux Klansman’s uniform making an obscene gesture; a patch incorporating KKK, a swastika, the words ‘Aryan Pride’, and a black man with a noose around his neck hanging from a tree. Appellant had on occasion displayed these tattoos to people and had been heard to remark, ***‘See my little nigger hanging from a tree.’*** ”

King also wrote in letters that he believes white ladies who date black gentlemen should be swinging on trees along side of them.

Russell Brewer also received the death penalty. In a letter produced during Brewer’s trial, Brewer confessed, ***“Well, I did it. It was a rush, and no longer am I a virgin. I am***

licking my lips for more.”

Brewer was executed on September 21, 2011. The day before his execution, Brewer told KHOU 11 News in Houston: ***“As far as any regrets, no, I have no regrets. No, I’d do it all over again, to tell you the truth.”***

Brewer is so vile, he even ruined it for everyone else sitting on death row. Just for spite, he ordered a “last meal” that included two chicken fried steaks, a triple-meat bacon cheeseburger, a large bowl of fried okra, a pound of barbecue, three fajitas, a meat lover’s pizza, a pint of ice cream, and a slab of peanut butter fudge with lots of crushed peanuts. However he did not eat any of it, and the meal was discarded, prompting Texas prison officials to end the eighty-seven year old tradition of giving special last meals to condemned inmates.

Now, for your last meal on this earth, you just get what everybody else in the cell block is having.

And all of this because three white men decided to give a black man a lift home.

Oh, and to add insult to injury, the citizens of Jasper, Texas, most of whom we can assume were decent, hard-working citizens, saw their property taxes skyrocket by 8 percent--although some officials said it ended up being closer to 12 percent.

And then, there is the matter of that thing which we cannot put a price upon: a human being’s life. In this case, the life of a conscious man dragged for three and a half miles, fully alert, in agony, struggling to save himself until he was decapitated by a culvert

James “Toe” Byrd’s crime: hitching a ride.

This is hate. This is the spirit of pure evil.

Part of what makes the Byrd murder so horrifying, so unbelievable, is that this nightmare did not occur in the post Civil War South. It did not occur early in the century, when bitter memories of north-south or black-white relations were overpoweringly hateful. Nor did this unspeakable crime occur during the regional insanity of the civil rights movements of the 1950’s and 60’s.

No, this murder was committed in a time and in a country that we like to consider “civilized.” A time during which the South sought to paint itself as “The New South”, a place where all Americans were welcome to come and raise their families in peaceful, integrated communities.

Specifically, the year was 1998: the first Harry Potter book had just been released, “Titanic” was flooding the theatres like a tsunami, “Seinfeld” was (alas) ending, Clinton was finally admitting the Lewinsky affair, Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa both chased the homerun record set by Roger Maris in 1961, and in the end, both broke it, with 70 and

66 home runs respectively. And good old John Glenn returned to space.

But in spite of all this progress, white supremacists were still preying on blacks, torturing and slaughtering their own neighbors.

Basketball icon Dennis Rodman paid for James Byrd's funeral and gave the family \$25,000. Fight promoter Don King gave the family \$100,000 for the education of Byrd's children. They used this money to found the James Byrd Jr. Foundation for Racial Healing.

Ross Byrd, the only son of James Byrd, has been involved with Murder Victim's Families for Reconciliation, an organization that opposes capital punishment.

He has even campaigned to spare the lives of those who murdered his father, and he appears briefly in the documentary *Deadline* about the death penalty in Illinois.

At the very least, Toe has left one hell of a legacy.

Rest in Peace, James. "I believe I can fly."

We believe it too, Byrd. Fly to a better place.

JASPER, TEXAS, 1998

by Lucille Clinton

i am a man's head hunched in the road.
i was chosen to speak by the members
of my body. the arm as it pulled away
pointed toward me, the hand opened once
and was gone.
why and why and why
should i call a white man brother?
who is the human in this place,
the thing that is dragged or the dragger?
what does my daughter say?
the sun is a blister overhead.
if i were alive i could not bear it.
the townsfolk sing we shall overcome
while hope bleeds slowly from my mouth
into the dirt that covers us all.

i am done with this dust. i am done.

ACHILLES IN JASPER, TEXAS

by Jeffrey Thomson

I know this: a man walked home drunk
along the corduroy of pines
in west Texas, the bronze duff and
the dust and the late light that fell
on him. Three men gave him a lift
that afternoon and raised him
with their fists and lowered
him with their *nigger this* and
nigger that and after a while,
when all the fun they could have
with him leaked out into
the ruts of a logging cut,
they tied him to the boat
hitch of their truck and pulled
away. I know he kept his head up
awhile because his elbows were
ground to the bone; I know enough
was finally enough, and his head
left his body behind,
but I don't know what to do
with this, America, this rage
like Achilles twitching
Hector behind his chariot
for 12 days until even
the gods were ashamed.

--Jeffrey Thomson

CHAPTER NINE

OCTOBER MOURNING

"The Guardian Doe ..."

Imagine that you are one of those people who actually manages to get up every morning and exercise. Imagine that you are the outdoorsy type, and you are so ambitious that your regime not only includes daily exercise, but exercise outdoors. (Right now, writing this in the middle of a Virginia winter, I personally cannot.) Imagine that you are a cyclist, taking in the beautiful fall countryside. It is October, and the vestiges of a gorgeous Autumn are still visible as you--

Wait, what is that? A scarecrow? You pedal closer for a better look.

But this horrible vision tied to a fence is no scarecrow.

It is a human being, a diminutive adult, barely more than a boy, lashed to a fence post and barely clinging to life, after being left in the Wyoming winter for eighteen hours. The cyclist notices the massive amount of blood ... on the ground, all over the body, particularly pooling in the ear.

Horrified, the cyclist hurries to the home of a professor friend where they call 911, then they rush back to attend the poor boy, as help speeds to the rescue.

The first responder--who had only been told that she was en route to help someone who had been beaten up--is officer Reggy Fluty, whose poignant memories of the incident haunt her to this day. She remembers finding him tied to the fence, and noted that ***"his hands were bound behind his back so tightly to a buck fence that it was difficult to cut him free."*** She noticed he wore braces.

And it was she who first noticed that the only place on his face where you could see any flesh was where the tears had washed away the blood: ***"The only white skin on his face was where he had been crying."*** As Officer Fluty waited for the ambulance, she tried to comfort Matthew, saying ***"Baby Boy, I'm so sorry this happened to you."***

A young man, really still just a boy, tortured and bludgeoned nearly to death. And all of this hell inflicted upon him because of his sexual orientation.

And, at the risk of inducing de ja vu (I am recalling the James Byrd murder, which had transpired just months earlier), part of what makes the Shepard bludgeoning so frightening is that this nightmare did not occur in our nation's primitive beginnings, when

backward ideas and vigilante justice were a part of life in these United States. Nor did it occur in some dark, medieval times long past that were only marginally civilized, when sanctioned murder and sub rosa torture were not only acceptable, but often celebrated.

This was not 1553, when Henry the VIII passed the Buggery Act, making all homosexual acts punishable by death. This was not 1895, when Oscar Wilde was tried for “gross indecency” and sentenced to two and a half years of hard labor, a term so brutal that he died shortly after his release from prison. Nor was this 1945, where upon the liberation of Nazi concentration camps by Allied forces, homosexuals (aka “pink triangles”) were not freed, as were the Jews, gypsies, and intellectuals, but rather were re-arrested and forced to remain in prison, per Paragraph 175 of German law. Nor was it 1978, when San Francisco City Supervisor Harvey Milk could be gunned down in public by San Francisco City Supervisor Dan White out of some perverse professional jealousy mixed with homophobic rage, the entire matter being resolved with a verdict of voluntary manslaughter, rather than first degree murder--and all of this after the premiering of the highly dubious “Twinkie Defense.”

No--the year is 1998, quite nearly the new millennium. It has been a decade of important advancements, and grand things are happening: the world celebrates the launching of the first component of the International Space Station. At a conference in Rome, one hundred and twenty countries vote to create a permanent International Criminal Court to prosecute individuals for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. Two Stanford University Ph.D. candidates, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, establish a little company called Google. Viagra is approved by the FDA. Smoking is banned in all California bars and restaurants. After twenty years of bad luck in the Great American Race, Dale Earnhardt finally wins the Daytona 500. Celine Dione’s “My Heart Will Go On” is sweeping the country.

And great strides have been made by the gay community as well. The American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association have long since declared that homosexuality is not a mental illness, and the Americans with Disabilities Act specifically bans AIDS based discrimination. Tammy Baldwin becomes the first only gay non-incumbent ever elected to Congress, and San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown signs a bill requiring that all companies doing business with the city offer gay and lesbian partners Domestic Partnership benefits. The Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly of Churches calls for legal recognition of same sex marriage, and in a significant national development, the Central Conference of American Rabbis supports the right of same-sex couples “to share fully and equally in the rights of civil marriage.”

Ellen (1994–1998) and *Will & Grace* (1998–2006) introduce gay leading characters on TV, and both shows become beloved hits. And everybody’s favorite leading man, Tom Hanks, had won the 1993 Academy Award for playing a gay lawyer stricken with AIDS and battling homophobia in the brilliant film, “Philadelphia.”

Meanwhile, national and regional governments all over the globe were **decriminalizing** homosexuality--including, but not limited to--Romania, Macedonia, Macau, Ecuador, Tasmania, Bosnia, Chile, Tajikistan, South Africa, Albania, Serbia, Ireland, Gibraltar, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Hong Kong, the Ukraine and the Isle of Man.

But in spite of all the progress, in spite of all the breathtaking new signs of advancement in civilization, homophobic hate crimes still abound. And why was this young man cruelly murdered? His crime? Being openly gay.

As you may remember, Matthew Shepard was a twenty-one year old University of Wyoming college student who, shortly after midnight on October 7, 1998, met Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson for the first time at the Fireside Lounge in Laramie, Wyoming. McKinney and Henderson were repulsed by Shepard's somewhat open gayness. The two concocted a plot; they had led Shepard to believe that they, too, were gay. Matthew, believing they wanted to discuss the politics and struggles of the gay movement, followed McKinney and Henderson to their truck.

After getting into the truck, according to Henderson's testimony, "*McKinney pulled out a gun and told Matthew Shepard to give him his wallet.*" McKinney said "*Guess what? We're not gay! And you're gonna get jacked.*" When Matthew refused, McKinney hit him with the gun. With Henderson behind the wheel, they drove more than a mile outside of Laramie. As Matthew begged for his life, McKinney struck him while Henderson laughed. "*He (McKinney) told me to get a rope out of the truck,*" Henderson said. According to Henderson, McKinney allegedly tied Shepard's beaten body to a wooden split-rail post fence, then robbed him of his wallet and patent leather shoes. McKinney continued to beat him, and then left Matthew alone to die.

For over eighteen hours, Matthew was alone, terrified, and tied to that fence in near freezing temperatures "*with only the constant Wyoming wind as his companion,*" stated Prosecutor Calvin Rerucha in a McKinney hearing held on November 10, 1999. The morning following the brutal beating, a cyclist, Aaron Kreifels, who initially mistook Shepard for a scarecrow, discovered the horrible truth, and the police came immediately.

Shepard had suffered fractures to the back of his head and in front of his right ear. He experienced severe brainstem damage, which affected his body's ability to regulate heart rate, body temperature, and other vital functions. There were also a dozen small lacerations around his head, face, and neck. His injuries were deemed too severe for doctors to operate.

Shepard never regained consciousness and remained on full life support. While he lay in intensive care, candlelight vigils were held by the people of Laramie. Shepard was pronounced dead at 12:53 a.m. on October 12, 1998, at Poudre Valley Hospital, in Fort

Collins, Colorado. He was 21 years old.

Henderson pleaded guilty on April 5, 1999 and agreed to testify against McKinney to avoid the death penalty; he received two consecutive life sentences. The jury in McKinney's trial found him guilty of felony murder. As they began to deliberate on the death penalty, Shepard's parents brokered a deal, resulting in McKinney receiving two consecutive life terms without the possibility of parole.

It is heartbreaking to realize that it was the Shepards' desire that this young man, who had brutally slaughtered their son, not be given the death penalty, but rather be offered some measure of mercy. In response to their humanity, Shepard's heartbroken parents were offered these blood-curdling words from McKinney's prison cell:

FROM DENVERPOST.COM

The primary killer stands proudly by his slaughter.

“Matt Shepard needed killing ... As far as Matt is concerned, I don't have any remorse...The night I did it, I did have hatred for homosexuals.”

McKinney's initial motive was robbery. But he targeted Shepard, he said, because ***“He was obviously gay. That played a part. His weakness. His frailty.”***

McKinney now calls himself ***“the poster child for hate-crime murders.”***

Matthew Shepard's murder is one of those horrors that still continues to haunt the public writ large. Can you imagine yourself in his position? Left to die in agony; eighteen hours in a freezing, windswept Wyoming field. It must have seemed like a terrifying eternity.

A play entitled “The Laramie Project” has been performed all over the country, and Matthew has been immortalized in poetry, art, and music. The new collection of poems “OCTOBER MOURNING” by Lesléa Newman, most highly acclaimed and extremely moving, contains a series of verses recounting the death of Matthew Shepard, via perspectives as diverse as the very fence, the stars, and the sky itself.

Perhaps most importantly, The Matthew Shepard Foundation, founded by Matthew's parents, Judy and Dennis, dedicates itself to ***“replacing hate with understanding, compassion, and acceptance.”***

The Foundation's work is vast, tireless, and international, impacting everything from politics to education to family life. They speak, write, lobby, counsel, fundraise, advocate, and get laws passed: they are just another example of simple people living

simple lives, for whom life's meaning and purpose was changed forever by one brutal act of hatred. Yet from that horrific crime has come an organization which has done so much good.

And so it is duly noted that Matthew's legacy will--as it should--live on in art and song and poetry, theatre and film and legislation, and in foundations that fight the very hate which caused this tragedy.

But lest you think that all bases are covered, and that you don't need to do anything about it, make no mistake, there is always fresh, new hatred abounding, and if you spend a little time on it--about as long as you spend on, oh, say, YouTube or Facebook each week--you too, could find a way to help.

But what about a monument? Monuments are often erected to victims, or to those who have made a personal sacrifice for a great cause. As we speak, plans are in the works for just such a memorial.

There is an elderly man who has taken this on as his personal mission. He is determined that Matthew Shepard's legacy will live on forever: Nobody less than Fred Phelps has been on a decade-long campaign since the Shepard killing.

Perhaps you do not know the name Fred Phelps? Well, you should:

His children are estranged from him, as in, **want nothing whatsoever to do with him**, probably because he physically abused them and their mother constantly, sometimes threatening them with a pick axe.

Fred Phelps is famous these days because he has his own church.

And unlike some quaint churches who have comforting, welcoming names like "Our Lady of the Pines" in Horseshoe Run, West Virginia or "Shepherd's Field Chapel" in Mount Vernon, Missouri, or who have appealing, spiritually appropriate website titles like Kingsfieldchurch.org or Myhillson.com or revivingspirit.org or cityofgrace.org or Gladtidingsomaha.com or turningthehearts.com or SaintFrancischurch.org, Fred has taken a far different approach. His church, if anyone can call his monstrosity a church--a true temple to hatred, which he has honed with his own hands--sports a URL with a different sort of tone, so that potential parishioners will **know what his church is all about**. No confusion.

You don't get to Westboro Baptist Church by typing in westborobaptist.org or searching WestboroChurch.com or anything like that.

If you want to get to Westboro Baptist Church's very informative website, you have to type in

Godhatesfags.com

Once there, you are greeted by the church's busy-as-bees agenda, along with celebratory pronouncements:

“Thank God for 9 more dead troops. We are praying for 8000 more!”

“WBC to picket the memorial of Larry Hagman!”

“God sent the Sandy Hook shooter! WBC to picket the funeral of Sandy Hook principal!”

“God Hates Fag Enabler Roger Ebert!”

“Westboro to picket funeral of Boston bombing victim Krystle Campbell!”

But for now, and for the decade and a half since the murder, Fred Phelps has had something more permanent than just an angry internet forum screed planned. If he has his way, a monument will be erected in Laramie, Wyoming.

Fred’s logic is that the Matthew Shepard Monument belongs in the newly erected Laramie Historic Plaza, which displays many noble monuments recounting significant moments in our nation’s history: the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to The Constitution, the Mayflower Compact, the Magna Carta, and more. Fred Phelps believes very strongly that along with all of these noteworthy events, there should be a marker reminding us all of the day that Matthew entered hell, his soul condemned for all eternity because Matthew was gay. Fred has designed a prototype that you can see online; it will be made of marble with a bronze plaque reading:

MATTHEW SHEPARD
Entered Hell October 12, 1998
In Defiance of God’s Warning!

But, as I promised in a previous paragraph, there is terrifying and abundant evidence that Fred Phelps, in his ultra-hatred, is not alone. The parishioners of Landover Baptist Church, for example, have much to say about Matthew Shepard on their forum:

<http://www.landoverbaptist.net/showthread.php?t=16168>

One forum poster writes:

“Doctors said [his] skull was so badly fractured they couldn’t operate; an autopsy showed he received 18 severe blows to the head and bruises to his groin and inner thighs. Shepard also suffered a massive brain stem injury”

And then, ghastly as this sounds, following the word “injury” on the forum posting, the forum poster places a smiley emoticon, with the smiley showing a big “thumbs up.”

The poster continues:

“His attackers invoked the “gay panic defense,” pointing out that they were so distraught over the possibility that Matthew might be sexually interested in them that they were driven to the brink of insanity and ended up (due to no fault of their own)

killing him.”

And then, read the blood curdling reaction of the forum poster:

“But the omnipotent statist socialist ultra-liberals persecuted them anyway.”

Next, the poster shows a picture of Matthew Shepard; it is the iconic black and white portrait for those of you who know the Matthew Shepard story well. Then, next to the portrait of Matthew, he writes:

“Tell me, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, does this really look like an innocent man, or more like a sodomite deviant, sent by Satan to commit all manner of anti-family, anti-american acts of sexuality?”

And he finishes with these words, defending the brave self-sacrifice of the killers, whom he repeatedly refers to as Matthew’s “victims”.

“Friends, today is a day to remember the crime against humanity - the ultimate injustice - the Nazi-like crime of persecuting the pro-family crusaders who decided not to wait for a permission slip to defend the American family.”

And the thread that continues in this hate forum is about what you would expect. When one defender of Matthew dares to call the murderers out for what they are, pistol whipping him until he is brain dead, another poster responds:

“They needed to make sure that the gay was beaten out of him. Would you have denied them a right as basic as self-defense? Why do you hate fundamental human rights so much?”

Still other posters are chilling in a more predictable, but no less dangerous way:
“Why the liberals make such a big deal of one less fag in the world is beyond me.”

The same way that the Old South talks about ***“one more lynched nigger.”***

GOOGLE IMAGES: Fred Phelps Matthew Shepard Monument

DENOUEMENT:

NOT ALONE THROUGH THE LONG NIGHT...

Each of the souls who loved Matthew found a way to remember the hell he went through during that long, endless night. The words of his father brought your author to tears. My faith makes me hope--pray--know--that somehow, Matthew’s last hours were spent very close to God:

His father, Dennis Shepard’s words:

By the end of the beating, his body was just trying to survive. You left him out there by himself, but he wasn’t alone. There were his lifelong friends with him—friends that

he had grown up with. You're probably wondering who these friends were. First, he had the beautiful night sky with the same stars and moon that we used to look at through a telescope. Then, he had the daylight and the sun to shine on him one more time—one more cool, wonderful autumn day in Wyoming. His last day alive in Wyoming. His last day alive in the state that he always proudly called home. And through it all, he was breathing in for the last time the smell of Wyoming sagebrush and the scent of pine trees from the snowy range. He heard the wind—the ever-present Wyoming wind—for the last time. He had one more friend with him. One he grew to know through his time in Sunday school and as an acolyte at St. Mark's in Casper as well as through his visits to St. Matthew's in Laramie. He had God.

I feel better knowing he wasn't alone.

In her book, Matthew Shepard's mother recounts a detail from just after the incident that she says gave her some small degree of comfort. It would seem that Matthew Shepard was not entirely alone during his long hellish night in the freezing cold.

Another soul was nestled nearby.

In the words of first responder Reggy Fluty, *“I remember dispatch just said respond for somebody who has been beaten up, and when I got there, I saw a big bush and part of a buck fence. I saw Matt from the waist down and a big doe deer just laying there, and she was laying down by the bush. She was very comfortable. When she saw me running she didn't jump up and dash off. She kind of lifted her head and looked at me, and her ears went off sideways instead of that straight up alertness. And then she just got up and trotted off, kept looking behind her. That was so nice. Cause it was, you know, I said, ‘Oh good, he had peace with him, is what I got from it all.’”*

Reggy echoes the words that Matthew's mother said to Ellen DeGeneris. When she was interviewed some ten years after losing her son, Judy Shepard said, *“I like to think that the Doe watched over him during the night... That Matthew knew he was not alone...”*

REST IN PEACE, MATTHEW.

OCTOBER MOURNING: A SONG FOR MATTHEW SHEPARD

By Lesléa Newman.

The Fence

(that night)

I held him all night long

He was heavy as a broken heart
Tears fell from his unblinking eyes
He was dead weight yet he kept breathing
He was heavy as a broken heart
His own heart wouldn't stop beating
He was dead weight yet he kept breathing
His face streaked with moonlight and blood
His own heart wouldn't stop beating
The cold wind wouldn't stop blowing
His face streaked with moonlight and blood
I tightened my grip and held on
The cold wind wouldn't stop blowing
We were out on the prairie alone
I tightened my grip and held on
I saw what was done to this child
We were out on the prairie alone
Their truck was the last thing he saw
I saw what was done to this child
I cradled him just like a mother
Their truck was the last thing he saw
Tears fell from his unblinking eyes
I cradled him just like a mother
I held him all night long

CHAPTER TEN

EMMETT TILL, PART II

"I CAN'T SEE WHY HE CAN'T STAY DEAD!"

YOUR AUTHOR'S NIGHTMARES--A CONFESSION

Some ghosts are more restless than others. Some spirits are harder to silence than others. When I read the story of Emmett Till, or when I am drawn once again to watch the old news footage of the grisly crime ... from the moment after that body is dragged out of the Tallahatchie River, beaten and bloated and unrecognizable, always in my mind's eye, during my dreams, I see Emmett Till watching the aftermath of his own death, much like the glorious young child in "Lovely Bones." Or I see his smiling face and dapperly dressed child's person, whole and healthy, questioning along with the reporters, mingling with mourners at the funeral, standing vigil in the courtroom. In my dreams, it is as though the ghost of Emmett Till is hanging around to learn exactly why he was murdered--to see if perhaps there is some sense that his spirit can make of it after death, if he lingers around long enough. It is as though Emmett Till is waiting among the throng, the gathering, the mob, the masses, like a black and white ghostly image inserted into old documentary footage of a black and white crowd scene.

In my nightmare, it is just like Tom Hanks as Forrest Gump, showing up in the John F. Kennedy footage or the Dick Cavett show with John Lennon, or that chivalrous moment when Forrest comes to a young black girl's aid in the famous George Wallace desegregation newsreels--but in my dream, this ghostly insertion is not achieved through the magic of CGI, but rather the unrelenting haunting of a child who does not understand why his mortal existence was snuffed out at so young an age, and why such sadistic terror and brutal torture had to inform the last minutes and hours of his unstained yet unsustainable life ...

It has generally been agreed upon that Emmett Till's death has taken on a mythical quality, rather like the Kennedy assassination, or the murder of the three civil rights workers in that same sovereign state of Mississippi just nine years later. Perhaps part of that mythic quality has to do with the very young innocence of Emmett Till, thrust up against such evil and merciless bullies. Or perhaps it was the starker truth that those

murderers at the heart of it--what Joseph Conrad might have called "The Heart of Darkness,"--had escaped Lady Justice.

But for whatever amalgam of reasons, Emmett Till's story just would not die. A 1991 book written by Stephen Whitfield, another by Christopher Mettress in 2002, and Mamie Till-Mobley's own memoirs the next year all posed questions as to exactly who all was involved in the murder and cover-up. And around the same year that the aforementioned Beauchamp movie premiered, PBS aired their own installment of "The American Experience" titled "The Murder of Emmett Till."

The famous documentary by filmmaker Keith Beauchamp, a work almost a decade in the making, asserts that as many as fourteen people may have been involved, including Carolyn Bryant Donham, who has since remarried. (Mose Wright had heard someone in the front yard with "a lighter voice" affirm that Till was the one they were looking for, before Bryant and Milam drove away with Till.) Even *Sixty Minutes* did a piece on Emmett Till in 2005.

It was this undying drumbeat, largely led by Emmett Till's mother, that finally pressured federal authorities to act. Where the state of Mississippi had circumvented any true justice--as has so often been the case in the Magnolia state--the United States Department of Justice would step in, dig up the past, and try to atone for this egregious miscarriage of jurisprudence.

JUSTITIA CUNCTATOR EST JUSTITIA DENEGO

Among many other still urgent issues, there was the lingering question of who was buried in that casket? After all, the cornerstone of the Bryant-Milam defense was that it was **not** Emmett Till's decomposed body that had been found in the Tallahatchie River that grim day. And so the Feds finally decided to exhume the body.

In 2004, the United States Department of Justice announced that it was reopening the case to determine whether anyone other than Milam and Bryant was complicit.

LONG STORY SHORT:

It was with some degree of disappointment for the Till family and their supporters that, in the end, after all the avenues had been explored and the new investigation had been completed, the Justice Department decided **not** to press charges against anyone else that might have been involved, beyond the now deceased Bryant and Milam.

Yet it was also understandable. The two killers who acted alone during the worst part of the torture and murder were dead from cancer. Witnesses were dead, evidence had

been contaminated, paper trails were lost. And as for the possible participation in the murders by two young black boys--well, to paraphrase one person close to the case, "if, in the dead of night, in some hidden place deep in the woods, you bully one black boy into holding down another black boy whom you intend to murder, was the boy really a willing accomplice?"

And as for Carolyn Bryant, who began the entire lynch mob atmosphere with her accusations, there was not enough evidence to indict her after all these decades. But she lives in a kind of forced seclusion, fearful of opening her front door, lest the endless stream of curiosity seekers--and seekers of vengeance--decide to exact their own kind of justice for Emmett Till. Her fame, in which she once seemed to have basked for the cameras, during that infamous trial, has made her basically a prisoner in her own home. This is, at least to my way of thinking, rather gratifying.

So it would appear that the investigation into the murder of Emmett Till is over. As the Latin maxim goes, "*justicia cunctator est justicia dedego*". Justice delayed is justice denied.

But where jurisprudence sometimes let us down, the arts lift us up. It is abundantly clear, from the ongoing outpouring of movies, plays, poems, and songs that have been written about this poor child, this civil rights martyr, that his story will go on forever. Playwright Janet Langhart has even written a beguiling piece of theatre in which Emmett Till and Anne Frank meet up in some afterworld, pondering their fates and trying to make sense of them.

Moreover, Emmett Till serves as a kind of watchdog from beyond the grave: When the spate of aforementioned "contemporary lynchings" hit the media, those parties demanding--and sometimes achieving--more aggressive investigation into the deaths, always invoke the name of Emmett Till.

When the Trayvon Martin verdict was announced, similarities to the Emmett Till trial rippled throughout the country.

When Rapper Lil Wayne wrote obscene lyrics regarding sexual violence, and likened it to the pistol whipping given to Emmett Till, people were rightly outraged, and Pepsi-Cola dropped him.

And when one of the lone witnesses in the original Emmett Till trial, Willie Louis, passed away a few days ago--again, just as I was writing this--once again Emmett Till's voice rose from the grave, reminding us of this horrifically brutal crime and its unjust outcome. Reminding us to be ever vigilant.

And when Veronique Pozner, mother of the youngest victim of the Sandy Hook shootings, insisted, as had Mamie Till, that the coffin be open at the funeral service, so that all the world could see the body of her dead child Noah, just six years old and shot eleven times, once again the haunting of our nation continued.

Emmett Till was reburied after being exhumed for the investigation, and his original casket will be available to be seen at the Smithsonian's [National Museum of African American History](#) and Culture in Washington, D.C., when it opens in 2015.

LAST LINGERING QUESTIONS REMAIN:

One truth that has become abundantly apparent to me in the last two years is that the history of lynching in the American South has been well documented. One might ask, why rehash it, then? I choose to do so for two critical reasons.

1.) It is my aim not only to examine the heinous acts themselves, but to attempt to get into the mindset of those who not only participated in the atrocities, but who stood by and idly watched, not only content to do nothing, but even *enjoying* the torture, egging it on, and feeling that one more dead black man was indeed a good thing.

Hence, I leave this chapter on the re-opening of the Emmett Till trial with some comments made by the citizens of Sumner, Mississippi at the time of the murder and *original* trial. It is a grim glimpse into the mob mindset during those times. I include them here because they have been made available to us through the tenacity and tirelessness of filmmaker Keith Beauchamp, and those at PBS, and "60 Minutes."

But more importantly, I include them because I think we have to ask ourselves: does human nature really change that much, over a few short decades?

2.) I wanted to answer the Scary Question: did the mob and did the accused sound eerily like the rantings of the present day Appomattoxins, as shared in my earlier chapters? The answer frightens me. This is, after all, my hometown.

THE EMMETT TILL MURDER TRIAL-- EXCERPTS FROM THE MOB:

"We are used to doing things normal around here, and they just tried to run the thing. They thought they could run over the judge and the sheriff and everybody over there. They thought they could just take over, but they didn't."

--Anonymous citizen interviewed

"I'm almost convinced from the very beginning of this that this was by a Communistic front."

--Anonymous citizen interviewed

“I can’t understand how a civilized mother could put the dead body of her son on public display.”

--Anonymous citizen interviewed

“Listen, I’ll tell you right now if they gets justice, they’ll turn them loose. If I was on the Grand Jury, that is what I would do!”

--Anonymous citizen interviewed

“We never have any trouble until some of our southern Niggers go up north and the NAACP talks to them and they come back home. If they would keep their nose and mouths out of our business, we would be able to do more in enforcing the laws of Tallahatchie County and Mississippi.” --Sheriff Clarence Strider

“Isn’t that just like a nigger, to swim across the Tallahatchie with a gin fan tied around his neck?”

-a popular barbershop joke at the time

These were the reactions of the whites. The blacks of Money and Sumner were understandably terrified, and all but mute on the subject. One reporter managed to get a black man on camera, and he quizzed the young Negro about the murder:

REPORTER: “Young man, do you think these two men should be indicted?”

YOUNG BLACK CITIZERN: “I really don’t know, sir.”

REPORTER: “What do you mean ‘you don’t know’ ?”

YOUNG BLACK CITIZEN: “Uh, I don’t know if they should or not.”

REPORTER: “Have you studied the case by reading the papers, perhaps?”

YOUNG BLACK CITIZEN: “Yes sir.”

REPORTER: “And you don’t know whether they should be indicted?”

YOUNG BLACK CITIZEN: “No sir.”

REPORTER: “Thank you very much.”

Few people in this life have an opportunity to find out exactly what their soul is worth. But Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam did, when *“Look Magazine”* , just four months after the murder of Emmett Till, offered them \$4000 to tell the **true** story of what happened that night. Not \$4000 dollars each, mind you. But \$4000 to split between the two of them--about the price of a new truck, back then.

That's what it cost Roy and J.W. to sell their souls to the Devil.

The "Look" interview was published on January 24th, 1956, and it purported to be the true story of what happened that night, and how they came to murder poor fourteen-year-old Emmett Till. They not only admitted to the murder in the interview, but did so in graphic, arrogant, blood-curdling detail.

Under the Double Jeopardy law, of course, they could not be retried for the killing.

The article is both terrifying and disgusting, for several reasons.

Firstly, even though they could not be tried again for murder, they had to find some way to go on living in this world (both were haunted by death threats for the rest of their lives, not surprisingly), so we can assume that whatever version of the murder they gave in that "Look" interview, heinous as it was, was not nearly as horrific as the true torture, beating, mutilation, and murder must have been.

Secondly, according to the Roy and J.W. "Look" interview, they were actually goaded into beating and murdering the barely fourteen year old boy because, according to them, he was bragging about his prowess with the ladies, and his extensive experience with white women, even after eyewitnesses had testified to hearing Emmett in that barn screaming in pain and begging for his life.

Does anybody actually believe that this terrified child was bragging about his prowess and experience with white women, after all of the beating and pistol whipping and terrorizing, through this long, torturous night? Yet they both maintain that Emmett continued his sexual "backtalk" right up until the moment they shot him off the cliff, right into the Tallahatchie. **Roy and J.W. had to spin it so that in certain circles, they would be heroes.** Many white Southerners would no doubt read the "Look" interview and agree that Roy and J.W. had no choice but to kill the uppity, arrogant black boy.

And in case you are wondering, as your author is, if these two monsters ever experienced one iota of human sentiment that night, of normal reaction to what they were doing--as in, did they feel even one moment of remorse? Or guilt? Or fear?

Indeed they did, as J.W. Milam confessed in the "Look" article:

"The captors ordered the badly bruised Emmett back into the truck. They drove to the Progressive Ginning Company. **'When we got to that gin place, it was daylight,'** Milam recalled, **'and I was worried for the first time. Somebody might see us and accuse us of stealing the fan.'** "

Feeling fear. That they might be caught stealing a gin fan.

But that "Look" interview was published in January of 1956, and Emmett's mother

was to live another half a century. Happily, it was Emmett's mother who would have the last word: she would spend the next fifty years carrying on work and educational projects in memory of her son, and founding the Emmett Till Legacy Foundation.

However it is worth noting that one of the murderers had one last moment to bask in the sunshine of publicity when he was interviewed, once again, on August 25th, 1985. This follow-up interview was conducted jointly by Joe Atkins of the Jackson Daily News and Tom Brennan of the Clarion Ledger.

(The interview is in italics, Bryant's comments within the interview are in bold italics.)

We learn in the article that Roy Bryant still has his little store, but does not have his little wife. She divorced him and moved on. In his general store, he cheerfully waits on Negroes, saying ***"I don't mistreat a man because he's black any more than I do a white man,"*** he says. ***"I treat a man like I want to be treated."***

The rest of Bryant's words in the interview are almost beyond belief:

Roy Bryant's voice becomes a growl at the mention of Emmett Till.

"He's been dead 30 years and I can't see why he can't stay dead," he says.

Roy Bryant wants his privacy and worries that some young black might seek belated vengeance. He possesses such loyalty from friends that one of them nearly slugged a television reporter who recently tried to interview him."

And lastly, when asked by the interviewers what he remembers about kidnapping Emmett Till, about all the details of what happened the night of Till's murder--Bryant's response: *"he grumbles darkly that he isn't making a dime out of renewed publicity about Emmett Till's slaying. He says his memory could be jogged 'for a bunch of money.' "*

So there it is:

Four hundred pounds of enraged testosterone, ganging up on a little boy, helpless and alone. A White on Black Hate Crime, no question about it.

And egged on by a woman with the power to intercede, to stop it all. But who instead remains indifferent. Smugly smiling.

And yes, the guilty are charged. And yes, there is a trial. But it is a sham of a trial, in a town that has made clear its utter contempt for Negroes.

And nothing bad happens to any of the self-confessed guilty. Not the male attackers. And not the woman who allowed it all to happen.

The Emmett Till Story.

So here it is:

Four hundred pounds of enraged testosterone, ganging up on a little boy, helpless and alone. A White on Black Hate Crime, no question about it.

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“But didn’t I just read this?” you are asking yourself. ***“Isn’t this the Emmett Till Story? Is the writer repeating himself?”***

Yes. No.

Yes, it was the Emmett Till Story, but it is also the Cequan Haskins Story. And it happened in my backyard. (So to speak.) It happened in Appomattox, the small town of 1700 people that I call home. That I moved to, in hopes of finding peace.

Instead, I found the Cequan Haskins Story. A grim reminder of Emmett Till. And I have found so much more.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

APPOMATTOXIC: “SHUT THE FUCK UP!”

The next white on black crime that I will discuss--and it is the final one--involves the youngest victim in our stories thus far.

Fortunately, the attack did not result in the death of the victim, nor did it involve the permanent physical maiming of the victim. It merely resulted in major, ongoing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder so severe that this child needed to be put under constant medical supervision, for fear that the child might kill himself: at only ten years old, this child believes that there is something defective in himself, something deeply wrong with him, to have brought on a forty minute attack that included punching, choking and being burned repeatedly with a cigarette lighter.

A child of ten, exposed to such an attack, may very well be permanently emotionally scarred for life. The attackers, one of whom weighed nearly three hundred pounds, were both fifteen years old, and this attack took place on a school bus.

What makes this attack all the more tragic, brutal, and most importantly, avoidable--is that the bus driver not only *did nothing* to stop the forty minute attack, she egged it on, saying things like “**Anything to get him to shut up!**” She was saying this in reaction to the ten year old’s screams at being punched, choked, and burned.

And when you allow two fifteen year old bullies to continue what they are doing--punching, choking, burning--and give them license to do worse, who is to say that this could not have ended up in the death of this terrified child? All it would have taken was a single blow with a little too much force, applied to the child’s skull, and Cequan would have been dead. (This phenomenon is all too common, causing about 56,000 deaths annually in the United States alone, according to the CDC--that’s five times more fatalities than occur from drunk driving.)

And make no mistake, it would have been the fault and the crime of an adult caretaker known as Nancy Davis.

Because Nancy Davis made no effort to stop the vicious attack by two teens in her charge.

After all, children commit murder with frightening frequency. According to the United States Department of Justice--the statistics remain eerily consistent--children commit about a thousand murders a year. And over two thousand children take their own lives because they have been the victim of bullying.

Let us not be casual about the facts of this white-on-black attack. Children, such as these two particular fifteen year olds, who hurt smaller children and animals, usually do not improve with age. They often become criminals, and have been known to become serial killers.

For me personally, one of the most alarming aspects of this hate crime--and make no mistake, this is a hate crime--is that it took place in my own hometown. Basically, it happened in my own backyard, to coin a phrase, since my town consists of only 1700 people. Yet why should I be surprised, why should anyone be surprised, because this is a town where I hear the word "nigger" used by kids on the street, grown-ups from church, and little old ladies at tea. This is where the Stars and Bars--current banner of the Ku Klux Klan--is flown frequently, on trucks and in front yards, and in all kinds of jarring places. And this is where people are openly criticized, lectured, ridiculed, and threatened for being different.

So let's take a closer look at this hate crime committed in my home town, while I was a resident there, trying to get things going with the dollhouse museum.

THE BULLYING AND TORTURE OF CEQUAN HASKINS

BULLETIN: The attack is perpetrated.

Imagine that it is your child. Your child is coming home on the school bus, but what starts out as a simple trip across town becomes forty minutes of torture, during which your child is beaten, choked, forced to suck the nipples of his attacker, and burned repeatedly with a cigarette lighter, all the while your child is screaming in pain and terror. He is yelled at for the entire forty minutes: "**SHUT THE FUCK UP!**" and other even uglier epithets. He is called "**faggot**" and "**nigger**", over and over and over again.

And for those forty long minutes, the school bus driver not only witnesses the attack, but **encourages it**. What kind of evil person, what kind of adult charged with seeing to the welfare of children, would allow such an attack to continue for three quarters of an hour?

A sadist known as Nancy Davis.

It is a beautiful spring day, May 5th, 2011 to be precise, when the attack happens: Cequan Haskins, a ten year old special needs child, is ganged up on by two fifteen year old kids who are both twice his size. Their attack is sadistic, relentless, ongoing, and, let us emphasize again, witnessed in its entirety by Nancy Davis, who does absolutely

nothing to stop the attack on the child. Several times, she pulls the bus over to let other children out--and so the bus is stopped. This would be her opportunity. Her safe, logical, mandated opportunity to stop the attack.

But she does not go back to help the screaming, crying child.

Not even when the two bullies repeatedly burn him with their cigarette lighters.

BULLETIN: May 9th, CHARGES ARE FILED

Finally, a chance for justice, for little Cequan Haskins. Nancy Davis is charged with a Class Six Felony, Felony Child Neglect.

BULLETIN: INEXPLICABLY, TIME PASSES, NO JUSTICE

Half a year goes by, and although little Cequan Haskins is hospitalized, having nightmares, and suffering from severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the adult who encouraged the attack to continue has not yet gone to trial.

But it is finally time. The date is November 11th. After six months, this is Cequan's chance for justice. Yet, in a county of 17,000 people, the judge cannot manage to collect a jury that he feels can be "impartial" in the matter of Nancy Davis's Felony Child Neglect Charge. Claims of ties to the school system by potential jurors make it impossible for Nancy Davis to get a "fair trial."

No trial is rescheduled.

BULLETIN: VIRAL VIDEOTAPE

Finally, after enough people--people all over the world--have viewed the video of the attack captured on the school bus camera, the Appomattoxins are pressured to take action. A new trial is convened and Appomattox finally puts together its jury. In February of 2012, almost a year after the incident, the jury views the videotape of little Cequan being choked, punched, and burned as he cries for help and begs for it to stop. They listen to Nancy Davis egging on the attackers, urging the bullies to do anything that will get the crying Cequan to shut up: "**UGH, ANYTHING TO GET HIM QUIET, I GOTTA DRIVE THIS BUS!**" The two fifteen year old bullies respond to this by moving back in on Cequan like circling hyenas, and they begin yet again with the choking, hitting, and cigarette lighter burns.

Nancy Davis is acquitted of all charges.

The jury of ten men and two women deliberated for 30 minutes. A whole half an hour. To their credit, given the complexities of this case, they did deliberate 26 minutes longer than the jury did in the famous Jesse Washington case, which ended in the notorious lynching detailed in an earlier chapter.

Again: Nancy Davis is acquitted of all charges. (Last we heard from her, she was going to take a vacation so she could get over the trauma of the events of the last year. Poor Nancy.)

NOW, I'M MAD (Referring to your humble author)

Truth: every time I review these last couple of pages, and every time I go through the pertinent articles, I get depressed, and angry, and then I start ranting.

The rant goes something like this:

Why weren't more charges brought against Nancy Davis? I am guessing that one of the reasons she was acquitted was because she was guilty of a felony, and in a town of 1707, that's pretty much damning your neighbor to a hellish future. (Tough titties, I say, but I can sympathize.) OK, Deputy Commonwealth Attorney of Appomattox Les Fleet (who can be reached at 434-352-7627, and who also refused to take action when my museum was robbed, and the thief came forward), why didn't you slap on some misdemeanors, so Davis *at least* would have to do community service, or be otherwise punished and penalized? So she would *at least* have to sit in the corner with a pointy hat on, and think about what she did.

The few other citizens of Appomattox believe the same thing the pundits believe, about why so few charges were filed: District Attorney Les Fleet knew that if he charge Nancy Davis with a felony that meant five years jail time, absolutely nobody in that tiny town would vote to convict. It was a calculated risk, but one which of course worked out. Even one of the jurors corroborated, indirectly, the efficacy of Fleet's strategy. Not surprisingly, he would only speak off camera, and under condition of anonymity. Station WSET in Lynchburg reports: "He didn't want to go on camera and asked that we not release his name, but a juror in the Nancy Davis trial says everyone agreed she was guilty of something, just not the extreme that prosecutors were asking for."

Les Fleet could have asked for a charge that would stick. But he didn't. He wouldn't that's how things work in Appomattox.

But back to the pre-trial shenanigans: how did it happen, in a county of about 17,000, how did it happen that of the potential jurors who were selected from the county, 20% of them, (5 out of 27) were teachers, an almost statistically impossible state of affairs, and one that almost guarantees that there will be no trial (because no jury is possible), or a mistrial, or almost immediate grounds for an appeal on Nancy Davis's part?

And why, once the judge determined that there was not the potential for an impartial jury from the existing pool of 27, did he not IMMEDIATELY, during that same court session, set a new trial date, instead of waiting for months? I believe--please correct me if I am wrong--that such a state of affairs is in blatant defiance of our Constitution's guarantee of a speedy trial. It is not only the accused who wants this over and done with,

after all, but the victim needs satisfaction in a timely manner as well.

And here's what: I don't care to hear from any Legal Eagles-- (*like Michael Brickhill, Appomattox's Barrister Extraordinaire, who illegally rents out buildings which are basically firetraps, and in violation of the State of Virginia Fire Prevention Code*) --about why I am wrong. I am talking common sense here; I believe my readers know this, and when the laws stop being about common sense, when the laws stop being about and for the common man, *res ipta loquitur* and all that, well--would it be cliché to invoke Henry The Butcher's famous line in Shakespeare's Henry VI," Part II, act IV? Well... I guess it would, so I won't.

But where was I? Oh yes, my rant:

And why, in a town where the black population (31 %) is far higher than the national average (9%), were there no black persons sitting on the jury?

And, although personally I think that the two teens should have been charged with more than they were, at the very least, why is there not a shred of evidence of the parents being held accountable? Track the crime in any major city, or in any modern, responsible town, and the parents will be deep in this, whether they like it or not: parents have to pay for the graffiti perpetrated by their kids, parents are sometimes fined for truancy, and in the case of criminal behavior on the part of minors, Child Protective Services always wants to know what the hell is going on at home. Family counseling is part of both the treatment and the punishment when children commit violent crimes--need I go on?

These parents seem to have been out to lunch, on errands, hunting, at a fish-fry, at the local Wal-Mart, anywhere but involved with their kids either before, during, or after the trial. The victim's mother, Roxanne Haskins, was on this immediately, from the first day her child came home and cried about the bullies, (weeks before this particular attack was caught on tape, with no help from the authorities forthcoming), to this very day, as she still seeks some kind of justice for her son. And as for the authorities within the school system, who knew about the bullying for months, yet did absolutely nothing--absolutely nothing has happened to them.

I have read at least three dozen articles about this hate crime, and not one word about the parents of these little psychopaths. (And yes, I use that word on purpose: among the psychological and legal descriptors of a psychopath in the making: juvenile delinquency, irresponsibility, impulsivity, superficial emotional responsiveness, callousness and lack of empathy, poor behavioral controls, need for stimulation, lack of remorse or guilt...)

News Flash: You don't need to be an adult to display extreme psychopathological behavior, which is, of course, a grim prognosis for the individual's future--in fact, hell, it's a pretty grim prognosis for anyone who knows the psychopath in question. Being a psychopath isn't something that happens when you turn 16, like the right to drive, or 18, like the right to vote and drink (preferably in that order). It is a seed that flourishes like the worst kind of weed, given the ultraviolent society in which kids today live. And

without treatment, these kids are in dire, dire jeopardy.

By the way--don't bother looking for those articles online, to satisfy your own curiosity about the case. The Appomattoxin and Lynchburger newspapers did what they always do when the breaking news paints the town in a bad light. As we discussed in an earlier chapter, the bad news is simply deleted from the archives. Censorship. Shame on you, Appomattox. Little do you know, I have cut and pasted them into my files, hence the damning quotations below.

“In the video, Nancy [Davis](#) blamed the younger boy for the assault. She could be heard telling the child he was saying things he shouldn't and was picking on the bigger boys.”

-Chris Drumon, WSL News and Advance

OK class, everybody who believes that, raise your hand.
(Not a knock against Mr. Drumon, of course, but old lady Davis.)

And as if the preceding accounts of the attack aren't bad enough, here's the kicker--this bullying had been going on for months:

“The boy's mother testified he had been riding the bus since March. She said the day after he was first assigned to the [school](#), her son came home complaining of bullying on the bus. She testified she confronted [Davis](#) four times — in March, twice in April and in May. The first time, she said, [Davis](#) denied knowing about the bullying. She subsequently told the boy's mother he was causing the problems, not the older boys.”

-Chris Drumon, WSL News and Advance.

CAUGHT ON VIDEOTAPE:
MY FAVORITE QUOTATIONS
FROM BUS DRIVER NANCY DAVIS

“These little kids are going to find out they can't play with the big boys.”

“Let's just say these kids make their own rules up.”

“He gives just as much as he gets, and I am about sick of him.” --is was what bus

driver Nancy Davis said about little Cequan, when Cequan's mother attempted to find out what had happened; this according to the sworn testimony of Roxanne Haskins.

"I ain't dealing with this screaming shit all the way down the road!"

And then, in a moment of perjury-hypocrisy that your humble author simply would not have expected from an Appomattox Christian (Nancy Davis did swear an oath on the Bible, yes?) :

"I did not think there was bullying going on."

And another one of my favorites: ***"If I had any indication of what was going on, I probably would have pulled the bus over."***

This is flat out perjury; shame on the court for letting this slide: because in point of fact, during the long attack, Nancy Davis ***did have to pull over and let other children out of the bus.*** This would have been the logical and safe time to deal with it. Forget drama and detail--you just take the ten year old, sit him down on the seat closest to where you are driving the bus, tell the two bullies to go to the back of the bus (lovely irony, eh, Rosa?), and if they move from that spot at the back of the bus, you will do everything in your power to see that they are suspended from school or otherwise punished.

For Nancy's mugshot, go to [GOOGLE IMAGES](#)

"Appomattox Nancy Davis"

"She's not an octopus," Joey Sanzone (Davis's attorney) told the jury. "She can't do a hundred things at one time."

"Driving a bus takes so much of your time and attention and it is not set up to supervise everything," said Sanzone.

Joey. Get real. There were eight kids on this bus. And again, it was Deputy Commonwealth Attorney Fleet who reminded everybody that Nancy Davis made three, (3) stops to let other kids out while all of this was going on.

What makes places like Appomattox so frightening is that the problem is not as simple as nobody wanting to do their unpleasant duty.

Surely Donnie Simpson of the Appomattox Sheriff's Department was doing his job; he viewed the tape and followed through to the point where all parties were charged.

If one reads all available articles (I cannot afford the cost of the court transcripts; the Freedom of Information Act ain't exactly Free), Deputy Commonwealth Attorney Les Fleet seemed to be trying to do his job through all of this. In fact, in a dark, Alice-In-Wonderland world where the defense's great line was ***"She's not an octopus,***

she can't do a hundred things at once," and the court couldn't find an impartial jury for about a year, Les Fleet seemed to have the one shining moment of common sense in all of this:

To quote Chris Dumond, of "The News and Advance," ***"Fleet said it defied common sense to believe she didn't see the child being choked because she can be heard on the video admonishing the older child while it's happening."*** Or, to put it in other words, at one point, Nancy testified that the ten year old, while being attacked by four times his own weight, ***"he gave as good as he got,"*** --how could she know that, if she wasn't watching the entire attack play out?

No, the problem with Appomattox, and with towns like Appomattox--for there are innumerable such towns, dotted around this great country--is subtler than pointing a finger at the Sheriff's Department, the Commonwealth's Attorney, or even the court. The problem with the Cequan Haskins case, and in so many cases that have preceded it, and even with so many cases which will no doubt follow on its heels, is that there is a radically different standard for blacks than there is for whites.

Get real: Does anyone really doubt that if it had been 400 pounds worth of black kids ganging up on a little white kid, the outcome would have been radically different, both for the attackers, and for the bus driver who Aided and Abetted--particularly if that bus driver was black, like the attackers?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Let us be perfectly clear about this. These large little criminals committed a hate crime--

--Not schoolyard bullying, not assault and battery (with which they were charged), but something even more unconscionable; something containing, yet exponentially worsening, the effects of both psychological bullying and physical assault: they committed a hate crime. The fact that they were minors does NOT mean that this was NOT a hate crime.

Without visiting here the entire text of "H.R. 1592: Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2007", let us summarize by stating that the definition of a hate crime is as follows:

"The current federal law regarding hate crimes deals with crimes where the offender is motivated by bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity/national origin."

I would say that burning and choking and punching a child while you call him a ***"nigger"*** and a ***"faggot"*** fulfills the criteria.

These large little criminals violated the Old Dominion's laws as well. According to Virginia Code 52-8.5

"hate crime" means (i) a criminal act committed against a person or his property with the specific intent of instilling fear or intimidation in the individual against whom the act is perpetrated because of race, religion or ethnic origin or that is committed for the purpose of restraining that person from exercising his rights under the Constitution or laws of this Commonwealth or of the United States.

The two fifteen year olds committed felonies, as seen through the filters of both the Virginia State Code and Federal Law.

It does not cease to be a hate crime, nor does it fail to rise to the level of a hate crime, just because the boys were minors. Now, I will grant you, as minors, they should be granted anonymity (have I told you their names?) and they should not be tried as adults. But they were each charged with a misdemeanor. These were not misdemeanors. They were felonies.

And their sentence (each kid got a couple of months in Juvie), is neither punishment enough nor help enough. Each of these little turds should be sentenced to community service for a few hundred hours, just enough to interfere with their ultraviolent gaming for the remainder of their high school years--their tenure as minors.

As for help, these kids need long term, serious counseling, which they will not get in Juvenile Hall. Juvie will just teach them more about being Juvenile Delinquents. Even the most primitive research indicates that this is so.

As for the kids' parents--there is no way around it: they were the ones using and condoning the word "nigger," one can almost be one hundred percent certain of this. Simple common sense. I assume these kids weren't becoming so comfortable and facile with the word from their pastor or their teachers. The parenting skills buried in this hate crime must be staggeringly sub-par; personally, I have known animals that have raised far kinder offspring.

As for the state of our victim: it has been three years since the attack, and because I do not know him personally, I cannot comment on his current mental or emotional state. What I do know for a fact is that bullied children kill themselves, and in horrifyingly large numbers. Although the old cliché "Even *one* child is too much," obviously applies here, sadly, the numbers are way beyond "one."

According to the Centers for Disease Control, about 4400 children per year take their own lives, and about half of those are prompted by bullying they have experienced.

Translation: even though the kids who attacked Cequan Haskins did not murder him when they burned and punched and choked him, it doesn't mean they might not ultimately be responsible for killing him.

As for Nancy Davis:

While I applaud the authorities in Appomattox who investigated this crime and then charged Nancy Davis with Felony Child Neglect, I also respectfully--and vigorously--disagree. What Nancy Davis did was even worse than the legal concept of child neglect, which is horrific enough. With full knowledge of what was going on, Nancy Davis egged it on.

As for Nancy Davis:

Nancy Davis aided and abetted a hate crime, and should have been charged with as much. The kids were teens. Nancy Davis is a 65 year old Christian grandmother, which makes her behavior as close to unforgivable as it can get, that's my take on it.

As for Nancy Davis, who watched in her rear view mirror as these two teenage terrorists tortured a child for three quarters of an hour--I can think of only one word for her.

Monster.

Surely, surely, Nancy Davis is some manner of monster.

EPILOGUE TO CEQUAN'S CHAPTER

We as Americans have a glorious past and a promising future, but we have a lot of ugliness for which we must atone, if we are to keep our integrity as a nation. This book has documented just a few examples of same. At this very moment, both the vox populi and the body politic is struggling with what to do about the shameless hate rhetoric of the Westboro Baptists, which the vast majority of Americans, regardless of their partisan leanings, seem to understand instinctively is NOT a matter of "freedom of speech", but rather the spewing of pure hate.

(Happily ... yes, that is the word I finally choose ... after two years of my working on this triptych of racism books, Fred Phelps largely solved the Westboro problem, as I was in the closing lap of book formatting, by keeling over dead. Fred, R.I.P.--Running is Pointless. One of the two of them--Satan or God--is going to catch your tail.)

It is both alarming and humiliating that when you conduct a multiple language search of the Cequan Haskins case, he is being talked about all over the world. Web pages covering the crime come up in Spanish, Arabic, German, Italian, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Chinese, Cherokee, Swahili, Tumbuka--the list goes on and on. The entire planet is looking to a tiny town in the United States to see how our country really feels about bullying, and about the supposedly responsible adults who allow it to go on and on. And this watching world has sadly seen that, in the case of a jury selected from this little

American village of 1707 people, it's really just not that big a deal. And apparently, it takes an entire village to ignore a child.

Bus driver acquitted. Next?

Articles written by the Appomattoxins (before local powers-that-be censored them from the archives) have been translated and shot through cyberspace to struggling countries thousands of miles away--countries who are still trying to figure out what they think about this whole civil rights thing, and who are looking to us as a shining example--and some of these news stories end with Nancy Davis yammering about how this has all made her life, *her* life, "a living hell".

And so, as we close this chapter, and this section of the book, I offer this public plea, this brief open letter, if you will, to the Federal Government Writ Large:

My life in Appomattox, and in other small towns like it, has taught me that local government will not always put much effort into investigating a hate crime--or, even if it is properly investigated, into the vigorous prosecution of that hate crime. (Since the evolution of this chapter, Kendrick Johnson has become another sad name in the news, his death being a textbook example of local law enforcement bungling, incompetence, and apathy.) The law informally known as the Matthew Shepard Law seems to have embraced an understanding of the aforementioned problem, and hence has given the federal government broader powers of prosecution---vis-à-vis, they can step in if the local authorities just don't seem to care that much. (Does it surprise anybody that there was apparently no known effort to find out who defaced the Obama signs with the KKK symbols, as I recounted in the grim anecdote that both started this book, and foreshadowed the tenor of my term with the Appomattoxins?)

So I am inviting the Yankees to revisit Appomattox, to revisit the Cequan Haskins case, to revisit the Kendrick Johnson case, as well as so many of the aforementioned lynchings and "suicides" ... I am inviting the Yankees to redouble their efforts to uncover the cover up--hate crimes abounding in Mayberry, USA.

And to think I used to like that show.

"We will lynch you and your jungle bunny crumb snatchers, free ride is almost over then it's cotton fields for you apes."

"What about those niggers, what can be done about them? Forced showers and sterilization anyone?"

“Send them back to hell where they came from. They don't deserve to take up space here.”

“Let these lazy baboons and their "igglets" freaking starve..work or die.”

PART THREE:

**“ ...To see the face
of God...”**

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE PREACHER

Certain readers may observe that the ending to this book, “The Little Book of Lynching” bears an almost word-for-word resemblance to the ending of “Liberty’s Tyranny”. That is a conscious choice. There is a reason for that. My logic is best described in a charming little anecdote that circulates in the preaching community. It’s an old favorite of mine.

A story is told about a man who preached an impressive sermon, seeking to be the pastor of a new church. It was a heartfelt sermon, filled with examples of The Golden Rule and Do Unto Others and Love Thy Brother As Thyself and Corinthians 13:13 and so forth. Beautiful! Inspiring! Everybody loved it and voted for him to become their new pastor.

They were a bit surprised, however, when he preached the same sermon his first Sunday there—and even more surprised when he preached it again the next week. After he preached the same sermon the third week in a row, the church leaders met with him to find out what was going on. The pastor assured them, “I know what I’m doing. When you start living out this sermon, I’ll go on to my next one.”

Translation: it’s a bad place, out there in the world, with evil people doing dark deeds. It’s a depressing place, full of hardship and pain and misery. The bad guys are always almost winning, right on the verge of triumph. We need every soul we can get, fighting on the right side. On the side of Good. Hence, I will probably end many of my books this same way. And why not?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THIS IS THE END, MY FRIEND

I didn't expect this book. I was planning on writing a fantasy involving World War II soldiers called "The Ash Boys." It was only because of my horrible experiences in Appomattox and the egregious racism I witnessed there, as well as the things I learned about Liberty University, that I felt it was a matter both imperative and urgent--for me to sit down and write these books.

"Wigger." "Liberty's Tyranny." "The Little Book of Lynching."

After two years of burying myself in stories and incidents of bigotry, xenophobia, homophobia, religious intolerance, religious zealotry, and fundamentalism run amok, along with the seemingly endless accounts of lynchings, both long past and all too recent, I had a bizarre realization: I had no ending for this book.

I had no ending for this book.

This was odd to me, because, like many writers, I tend to know the end of my story, and the end of my character's journey, first, from the very beginning. And the fun part, the fascination, is with seeing exactly how he or she gets there. Granted, sometimes you create an odd character, and see where his personality and predilections take him. Or her. But more often than you would guess, the author knows the endgame even better than he knows the opening paragraphs.

Why couldn't I come up with an ending for either ***"Liberty's Tyranny"*** or ***"The Little Book of Lynching"***?

And then, it hit me. That is because an ending implies closure. And closure is precisely the opposite of what we have here. In these books we have shed a light, pulled back a curtain, lifted a rock--choose the cliché of your choice--but the point is, a horrific problem has been uncovered. And now, clearly, something needs to be done about it.

What to do about lynching in America? And what to do about the racism that causes it?

Well, those solutions are so obvious that they have already been enumerated about a million times, but ever so briefly, here we go again:

Talk about it. Insist that people know how passionate you are about this subject. Shut down any racist conversation within earshot, especially if someone tries to engage you in

it--on the job, at happy hour, while you're carpooling to work, during church, at the club, in a town hall meeting. Rage against racist jokes, and, to put it in the vernacular, call people on their shit. Ruthlessly. Proudly. Unflaggingly.

Use the internet, and your email tree, for more than just sending all your friends funny cartoons about how hilarious it would be if your cat could speak French. Email the stories about the people we have talked about in this book, particularly the recent cases that remain unsolved and/or shoddily investigated. Particularly if they are still active news stories, and can still be swayed by a tsunami of public opinion. Play Poseidon. Start that tsunami.

Check in regularly to a host of forums discussing racism, from Craig's List to Topix to City-Data and on and on. (Although personally, this is my least favorite strategy, as I consider it to be the least effectual.) I know some of you may say that you don't have time for it, but funny how we all have time to click on that Kim Kardashian story.

Start a Facebook page about racism, if you are really committed. Send supportive web traffic to web pages dealing with racism.

You can always do the obvious (and more on this in the next chapter), you can translate your rage into political activism. Get involved in local elections, as well as state and national ones.

Join the NAACP. What, you think they won't let you join if you are white? Many of us are members of the ACLU, the NRA, The National Association for Women, Rotary, Elks, Lions, Masons, Girl Scouts, Military Wives Club, Red Hats--the list of what we belong to goes on and on, how about including the NAACP on that list? Show you membership card around proudly.

Shock your neighbors. Attend a black church. I have, and I can assure you, their God is basically your God. You are even allowed to imagine he's white while you are sitting in their pews, if your current sensibilities are in jive with Fox's *Megyn*--**"Santa Claus is white, he just is"**-*Kelly*. Wear a festive hat. Blacks seem to take far more joy in their worship of God than the Baptist Nazis in Lynchburg, Virginia who attend *Jerry*--**"Christians, like soldiers, ask no questions"** -*Falwell's* Thomas Road Baptist Factory.

Get really committed: become a Big Brother or Big Sister. It only takes a few hours a month; don't tell me you don't have that kind of time.

Take in a Foster Child.

But beyond the above admittedly unoriginal list, I will say no more about what to do about racism:

I will not insult the hard works and voluminous words of the hundreds, no doubt thousands of writers, thinkers, and activists who have come before me and given essentially the same advice.

People, we know what to do about racism. The ideas have been out there for as long

as racism has been out there. The problem is not that we don't know what action to take, the problem is that we all sit on our (to paraphrase Dennis Miller) **ever-expanding Snackwell's ass**--and do nothing. We, almost all of us, almost all of the time, do absolutely nothing. Oh, we may pride ourselves on our pith, injected into some forum comments on Huffington Post--we may even be a "Super Poster"--clearly a synonym for Loser.

Here's the fact of it: words, just words, in the end effect very little change, unless they are being uttered by the likes of Churchill, Hitler, Jesus, Patton, and such types. But ask any human soul who needs--and I am talking about true need, not brainwashed, imagined, self-pitying "entitlement need"--any human soul who has a need, **what he does not need is your words. She needs your actions.**

So, since we all know what to do about racism, just as we know what to do about the myriad of other problems which plague us as individuals and as a society, the more urgent problem is **why don't we do them?** This book is not about that. This book is about exposing the problem, and hopefully getting you mad enough to take the actions that you already know must be launched.

And why shouldn't you be the one taking action? "The Little Book of Anger" is about taking action. "The Art of War" by Sun Tzu is about taking action. Tony Robbins is about taking action. Etcetera. ("The Promise" by Rhonda Byrnes, by the way, is NOT about taking action, it is about committing mental masturbation while high on Prozac while sitting in an overly heated jacuzzi while drinking wine coolers and pigging out on a massive amount of cotton candy, the kind you buy in bags at the 7-11.)

Here's the conundrum: we are all, each of us, fighting wars in a dozen different theatres, on a hundred different fronts, from a thousand different foxholes. Why is this one so important? What will you do about this?

Well, if you don't do anything about this, I implore you, please at least do something about something.

I KNOW THERE TO BE THREE KINDS OF PEOPLE:

1. There are people who would never even bother to read a book like this. (Too depressing?)

2. People who read books like this, and then discuss them over dinner parties and at cocktail soirées and at book clubs and in other such scenarios with great concern. They sound intelligent and caring, informed and citizen-of-the-worldly. They are frauds. They acquire their patina of social consciousness at the cost of other people's suffering. They

make no difference in the world. Actually they do make a difference--for the worse. They are part of the problem. I would rather hear some addled blonde debate the Bachelor's decision vis-a-vis the Final Rose than hear these people twaddle on about heart-wrenching problems that they have no intention of doing a damn thing about.

3. People who read a book like this, and then decide what to do about it.

Back in the day, there was a public service announcement about drugs. It said something like, *"53 percent of drugs are done by kids who live in the cities. So who do you think are doing the other 47 percent?"* They were trying to alert people to the idea that drugs, both hard and soft, were making their way into suburbs and towns, the country, the little Mayberries that dot our landscape. It was a valid point.

Maybe sometimes I just get cranky and become a glass-half-empty kind of person, but I rather feel that way when I peruse the statistics for volunteering. Allow me to elaborate: I recently read that roughly between one fourth and one third of adult Americans volunteer. While some studies claim that it is on the rise, others claim that it is dropping, leading me to believe, based on a comparison with past figures, that the numbers are remaining fairly consistent. Also, it depends on how you define volunteering: i.e., number of hours served per annum, formality or regularity of commitment, etcetera--still the numbers remain fairly steady at one third to one quarter of America getting off its collective butt and helping their fellow man. Woman. Child. Senior. Person. Dog. Cat. Wild thing.

(By the way, go Provo, Utah!, with its 64% volunteer rate, highest in the country, last time the world looked.)

But what about the rest of us? Hmmm? What about the rest of us?

It's like the drug commercial. It's all too much like the drug commercial. When I see that statistic, I don't see one out of every three people charging out to make the world a better place, I see two out of every three people clenched so deeply by the arms of their La-Z-Boy, their asses now melded with the naugahyde, their eyes so riveted on whatever television show has mesmerized them for the moment: *Dancing With The Stars*, *Nascar*, *Honey Boo Boo*, *Duck Dynasty*, and on and on ...that they can't imagine the thought of going to a Wednesday night fundraiser. They can't imagine spending some time on the weekend helping those less fortunate.

Yes, I know, we're all busy, especially people with families. But busy with what?

Well, I guess that depends on whether you are single, or have a family. If we are single, in addition to our job, we generally spend most of our time looking for happiness and fulfillment. Oh, I don't care if you spend you time at the mall or on the links, at the spa or at the gym, getting therapy or practicing yoga, at a bar or at a barbecue, cruising

the internet or channel surfing, the raw truth is that most of us are spending any spare time we have seeking happiness and fulfillment. Hey, I got a tip for you. The fast lane. Top secret. Sure fire. Hiding in plain sight. Hey, I got one word for you: volunteer. You will immediately be on the track to much more happiness and fulfillment.

Oh yes, I will grant you, sometimes it takes trying several different charities and organizations before you find your soulmate, cause-wise. Or maybe, like the Mormons of old, you have more than one soulmate. (Read: cause.) And I will also grant you that volunteering can often be daunting and depressing, given that you have chosen to look squarely in the face of need, sadness, hardship, and pain.

However, I promise you this: once you do find your "soulmate"--***that cause which stirs you more deeply than any material thing on this earth ever could***--the moments of bliss, peace, and satisfaction you derive from engagement will trump any "high" you have ever known. And trust me, *that* is a subject about which, I am sorry to say, I know far too much.

But what of those folks with families? Easier for them to take their daytimer and their To-Do list (both now more likely found on an electro gizmo tablet, rather than scribbled in some leather bound booklet or affixed to the refrigerator with a whimsical magnet), and use that busy bee schedule as an excuse, than it is to actually get up, walk out their front door, and change the world. That newfangled tablet, in fact, has become something akin to an electronic shield, just as our babies and children have become human shields. "*I can't volunteer, it takes every minute of my free time just to raise this!*" (Wave baby in the air for emphasis.)

But first of all, that's a lie. According to an entire 'nother set of statistics, which remains eerily consistent, regardless of who seeks out the data, the average parent spends about an hour a day with their kid. (I don't know if it is frightening or hilarious that about five percent of parents think this is still too much.) And considering that the above mentioned *hour per day average* is skewed by the lengthy weekend commitments--driving the little nippers around to soccer games, ballet practice, band, martial arts, scouts, play dates, etcetera, all of which tend to take up a much greater swath of time--it means that the amount of time any parent spends with their child during those perennially traumatic school days is whittled down to almost nothing. A few minutes. One study puts it at seventeen minutes.

And those statistics don't even delve into the thornier issue of what constitutes "spending time" with one's children. If you are all sitting down to dinner together, and your kid spends the entire meal mute, ignoring you, and texting away, have you really spent any time together?

All of this accumulated data begs the question: exactly what are we teaching our children, during those seventeen minutes, or however long it might be? For most parents, it's not how to do homework. A frightening new study from the National Center for

Family Literacy corroborates what other studies have discovered. Specifically, from the parent pool, 21.9 percent of all parents are too busy to help their kids with homework, 31.6 buckled to kids who say they don't want their parents' help with homework, and a whopping 46.5 percent of parents say they just don't get the material. Just don't understand it. Damned disinspiring statistics, if you ask me. But surely, surely, any parent understands how to shut off the TV, the Playstation, the Wii, the computer, the Ipod, the texting screen, and drag their kids out into the real world to do some good.

That presumes, of course, that the parent is inspired to, and committed to, doing some good. The fact that so many simply are not scares the hell out of me. Sad.

And what is so sad here isn't that the parents--and kids--don't seem willing to give, but that they aren't even selfishly astute enough to go out and reap the very real, very personal benefits of volunteering. Make no mistake, volunteering helps the volunteer every bit as much as it helps the volunteered. (?)

Just to pull one study out of the air--and there are hundreds of such studies, by the way:

“Among teenagers, even at-risk children who volunteer reap big benefits, according to research findings studied by Jane Allyn Piliavin, a retired University of Wisconsin sociologist. She cites a positive effect on grades, self-concept, and attitudes toward education. Volunteering also led to reduced drug use and huge declines in dropout rates and teen pregnancies.”

--U.S. News and World Report, April 4th, 2012

And as for adults, study after study--and I mean exhaustive, numerous, credible studies--all indicate that volunteering is as close to an overall wonder drug since--well, since forever: volunteering improves health on a wide variety of fronts, including increased longevity. It increases feelings of happiness, well being and self-esteem. It improves relationships. “Health Benefits of Volunteering”, a pdf from our federal government's own nationalservice.gov, even offers a detailed chart demonstrating that specific areas of heart health increase with the number of hours that a Baby Boomer volunteers. Apparently, there is a connection between the metaphorical loving heart, and the literally healthy heart.

As a person who has always volunteered, (first being shepherded around to events by mom), I cannot help but chuckle at those selfish souls who claim they haven't a jot of time to help other people, but who always have plenty of time for therapy, new age book immersion, self-help seminars, and assorted forms of self-medication.

What can I say? Apparently, I haven't volunteered enough hours yet to have had the snark bludgeoned out of me.

If it's happiness you want, get up right now and put someone else's happiness before your own--and this time, it has to be a perfect (or imperfect) stranger.

And if it's better kids you want, take them away from their computer, out into the sunshine, dragging them if you must, and teach them ***the truth*** about what it means to fight evil, be heroic, and become legend.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ORIGAMI PIGS BEFORE I DIE ...& *HAMMERTIME!*

I could give you all kinds of advice regarding what to do about the problems presented in this book, or any cause to which you attach yourself, for that matter. I could go for the old chestnut and tell you to write your congressman, or become involved in local POLITICS. You know how it goes--people bitch and moan about the quality of presidential candidates, then admit to never participating in the process that gets those candidates to the debate podium in the first place.

But just because phrases like "write your Congressman" and "get involved at a grassroots level" may be hackneyed advice, that doesn't make them any less valid. It is excellent advice, absolutely: it is my experience that clichés are bad in writing, because we are looking for the original thought, the fresh twist on ancient ideas--but in real life, clichés usually contain a kind of sagacity. They are off' repeated and time honored precisely because they contain wisdom and truth.

So yes, react politically. Please. History is littered with the carcasses of cultures who ignored this advice.

And even the best writers would agree with this. A physician turned journalist named Sheri Fink wrote a book called "Five Days at Memorial", a non-fiction narrative about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina at one of the local hospitals. Based on the author's earlier Pulitzer Prize winning article, it contains jarring stories of death, and of facing the certainty of impending death-- and how do you think she ends this powerful and unique book? She tells you to get involved with politics, write your congressman. (Or, in this day and age, use social media to get many people to write their congressman.) Sometimes, it is simply the best solution, even if it is just one of many.

In the case of the lynching problem still rampant in our Untied States, and the extant general bias against blacks when it comes to local law enforcement and local jurisprudence in ... how shall we say this delicately ... certain parts of the country, I will tell you unflinchingly that local political activism is exactly what is needed.

The role of District Attorneys, sheriff's departments, police departments, and other such grassroots personages and organizations factor in prominently, with regards to this crisis. And while sometimes D.A.'s are appointed, usually these titles are matters of local elections. You can insist that your District Attorney has the one quality essential for meting out justice fairly, and investigating cases thoroughly: he or she must be colorblind. If Justice is blind, then her servants must be colorblind. And if your local

District Attorney is appointed, than you can do whatever the hell it takes to influence and control the outcome of the election of the person who appoints your local District Attorney.

I have lived in a place where these titles are held by people who, in my observation, are incompetent, corrupt, and cruel. And I have seen the horrific outcome of such attitudes in action.

My telling you to write your Congressman or get involved in local politics may not be novel or scintillating, it may not seem like thinking outside the box, but if you don't get the powerful impact that these actions can have, then you don't get the whole point of being an American and living in America.

There is no excuse for apathy.

And if you do not even understand that your apathy makes you part of the problem, I don't want you sharing my country with me. And maybe you should move. In fact, please do. Soon. Now. This weekend.

Time and again, I have heard Holocaust survivors say basically the same thing.

To quote survivor Benny Hochman, author of "From Hell to Here", who lost his entire family in the Holocaust, ***"Don't forget, when you're old enough to take part in our government, you have the duty to vote for who you want to vote for. If somebody comes and tells you that you have to vote for so-and-so, tell them to go fly a kite."*** Then later, during that same speech, he directed his words specifically to the junior and senior high school students in attendance--but they were words choked with tears: ***"I have loved America from day one, when I met my first American soldier, to as long as I live. It means so much to me to live in this country that I never take the flag down. For me, this is my heart: America. You have the right to fight for freedom, for liberty, for choice. Go home and tell your folks that I said, if you don't vote the next election—for the dogcatcher, for the mayor, for the governor, senator, or whoever, and they don't vote—tell them, from me to you, 'Shame on you, Mom and Dad, shame on you ... I never miss it ... Thank you very much and God bless America."***

But activism goes way above and beyond the ballot box. (And I am speaking more generally here, of how to advance your particular cause.) If you want to feel alive, and you are not prone to common fears, you can resort to something more radical, like ***civil disobedience***, or else cozy up to the kissing cousin of civil disobedience, ***"Guerilla Marketing"*** .

Civil disobedience is a concept with which, I suspect, you are no doubt familiar--if you are the type of person to have picked up this book and read this far. But just so you know, civil disobedience can be far more creative than the ubiquitous 60's sit in, and

rather more fun than the martyr's fast.

If you have any doubts about an example of civil disobedience, I have two words for you: ROSA PARKS. Please tell me you know who this is. But what you may not know is that she was not what so many people mistake her to be--just an elderly woman who was too tired to get up, and who had had enough of being told to “move to the back of the bus.” This moment of defiance was neither spontaneous nor serendipitous. At the time she carried out this act of civil disobedience, Rosa Parks was secretary of the Montgomery, Alabama chapter of the NAACP, and she was also not the first black to be arrested for refusing to move to the back of the bus.* Rosa Parks was part of a larger movement--proudly so--and it had been agreed upon that hers was the case to be pushed through to the higher courts, and to draw the world’s attention to this ongoing thwarting of equal rights.

(*The first person to refuse to move to the back of the bus was a very brave young woman by the name of Claudette Colvin. Just fifteen years old, her mind was filled with stories of Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, whom she had just read about in school. She admired them, and wanted to follow in their footsteps, so when she was on a bus en route to school in Alabama during the summer of 1955, just nine months before the Rosa Parks incident, she decided not to move when several white people got on and the bus driver told her to move to the back of the bus. She followed in the footsteps of her mentors by refusing to move her feet at all, you might say.

The police were called, and they hauled the young girl off to jail, but not before kicking her brutally, even though she was slim, slight, and obviously harmless. After cuffing her and throwing her in the squad car, they called her names like “nigger bitch” all the way to the station, and when she got there, she was called “nigger” again, and, inexplicably, “whore”. You can learn more about her inspiring story from the NPR archives, or read the book about her story, “Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice”.)

Obviously, the concept of civil disobedience is not new to you. If you are truly selfless (which alas, I am not), you can go all “Gandhiesque,” although some of his strategies, like fasting until laws are changed, I am afraid are just not my thing. I care about a wide variety of causes and charities, but not enough to give up snack time.

But if you’ve a vestige of the hippie left in you, or if you have hippie DNA handed down from your parents or grandparents, then you might want to consider a different approach to civil disobedience. A great primer and excellent inspiration can be found in Abbie Hoffman’s “STEAL THIS BOOK”. Now, I wouldn’t recommend using most of his tips--among other things, many of his tactics are outright illegal--but the book is inspiring, and I find such brain food essential to get me thinking in the right direction. (Or the left direction.)

I don't even want to mention here how extreme some of Hoffman's ideas are, but the spirit of the book has trickled down to activists who use his kind of civil disobedience even today. I remember one 60's-esque strategy was to move large numbers of activists into a bank, have them peacefully stand in line, and each withdraw a dollar, then have them get in line again, only to redeposit it. This was a bit before my time, and dammit, I can't find on the internet exactly what they were protesting, but it probably had something to do with bank policy, and it had its own vogue there for a while. I mention it to show how benign, and even easy to execute, some civil disobedience can be, while still effecting change.

Granted, characters like Timothy Leary and Abbie Hoffman, and hippies in general (particularly the way they dressed), may look a bit ridiculous to some people today, viewed through the filter of the passing years. But their strategies are actually time honored, effective, and constantly being resurrected with much success. It is also important to remember--and even honor--the extremes to which activists were willing to go, in order to fight a system that was increasingly corrupt. These activists were, after all, living and fighting and struggling during a period which included Vietnam, Watergate, the Birmingham freedom marches and the attacks made upon them, Kent State, the '68 Democratic Convention riots, and a slew of assassinations, to mention just a few highlights. Desperate times call for desperate measures, and all that.

I will not dwell at length on the topic of civil disobedience for two reasons: one, it is edgier than most people want to take on. By definition, it implies breaking the law, ergo arrest is highly possible, and frankly, is that something you are up to this week? Schedule's already a little full, I am guessing? Secondly, if you are interested, the examples of it on the web are so ubiquitous, I think that I would be guilty of reinventing the wheel.

But, if you do fall into that rare group that wishes to commit civil disobedience, remember, many people have experienced arrest, and not found it particularly traumatic. They have been groomed for it, they are psyched for it. And because the eyes of the world (or at least the community, and their web fan base) are most likely upon them, the incarceration is neither traumatic nor lengthy. The authorities know that the world is watching.

Think of the famous people, like Woody Harrelson and Darryl Hannah, who protested the pillaging of the environment by chaining or cuffing themselves to trees, bridges, etcetera. Think of the pro-lifers who have gotten themselves arrested for peacefully sitting in front of the door to an abortion clinic and blocking the entrance. Think of Occupy Wall Street. You don't have to agree with all of them, but I think it's important to keep civil disobedience alive, because at the crux of it is the reminder that throughout history, the law books have been crammed with asinine and immoral laws.

Think of the Suffragettes, think of the Abolitionists and the Underground Railroad, think of the 3/5's Compromise, think of homosexuality being against the law--a felony, no less. And that list doesn't even include the funny laws that are still on the books.

But back to civil disobedience, moderned up:

--In May of 2010, the Greensboro, NORTH CAROLINA FIVE (as I am dubbing them) waited for the recess of a City Council meeting, took over the Council members' chairs, and pounded the gavel, publicly, denouncing the corruption of the police department. And if you research the highly racist nature of the goings-on which prompted this action, you will see that these five people were absolutely in the right. And the judge apparently agreed; they were charged with second degree trespassing, sentences waived. Being charged was actually a win-win: being arrested and charged effectively brought the issue to public light via the media, which is exactly what the protestors wanted, and the judge seeing the light meant that the protestors didn't even have to do any jail time or pay a fine.

And the North Carolina Five are not alone; during that same week, six preachers blocked a public building, protesting the same police corruption. Eradication of the rampant corruption and racism within the police department is not yet quite complete, but one point is clear. The citizens of Greensboro, by joining together in various forms of activism and civil disobedience, have kept this problem looming large on the world wide web for years now. The Greensboro Police Department can no longer indulge in racist or corrupt behavior, under the assumption that it is not being watched.

Acts like this take some courage, but in my experience, waking up in the morning takes courage, so it is a muscle that many of us have exercised far more than we know. If your cause is truly just, and if it is worthy enough, breaking bullshit laws or creating minor violations is a small price to pay for something which is very, very expensive to purchase: publicity--be it local, or global. And in a cyberworld where Jesus' face in a Dorito or a gourd shaped like Richard Nixon goes viral on the world wide web, getting your cause global is not as hard as you might think.

Now, on to the cousin of Civil Disobedience, Guerilla Marketing.

"Guerilla Marketing" is generally defined as using creative thinking and photo-op worthy event-making to get free publicity for your product or cause. (Over time, it has morphed to also include advertising that is not free, but is at least, innovative, surprising, and thinking-outside-the-box. The most immediate example that springs to mind is the new rage, "flash mob". Although flash mobs are hardly free--a fancy one can be into the five figures--it certainly gets people's attention. And seriously, you would have to be quite a sourpuss to not enjoy a flash mob breaking out while you are having lunch al fresco, feeding pigeons in the park, or racing through Grand Central Station.) But most of

the guerilla marketing that is paid for--sticker bombing, presence marketing, undercover marketing, bus and bench ads, is really just the old fashioned advertising approach with a contemporary twist. The *true genius* in hardcore guerilla marketing exists where the twin requisites, creativity and courage, carry the day--and best of all, because you have this great imagination, you've come up with a guerilla marketing idea which costs you virtually nothing.

Guerilla marketing is basically civil disobedience filtered down into something more benign, legal, and effective. And granted, sometimes the lines between these two categories blur; one great publicity stunt can be a little of both.

Here are some examples, to jog your atrophied mind:

PAYWITHPENNIES.COM tells people how to protest a bill, outrageous penalties and interest accrued on a bill, or the unnecessary complicating of the method of paying a bill, by paying it all in pennies. I do recall that in 2011, a Utah man was arrested for disturbing the peace after doing this, but rightly so: he was, in point of fact, arrested for dumping thousands of pennies on a receptionist's desk, which *is* disturbing the peace, and frankly a scary move in this day and age. What might this nut do next? It was not the pennies themselves which got him in trouble. The Federal Code states clearly that pennies are legal tender for all debts, public and private. There is a grey area here, as some merchants have a right to refuse payment in pennies (in the spirit of No shirt No shoes No service), but the government *has* to take it.

I wish I had known this ten years ago, when I got a ticket for turning onto the street where I lived. Overnight (literally), they had put up a sign in the Sherman Oaks suburb of Los Angeles "**No Right Turn Between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m.**" These signs are usually posted after a.) a pattern of excessive traffic on certain side streets and b.) the people on those side streets create a massive petition. The only problem is, nobody on the street remembers signing a petition, and, more importantly, those signs ALWAYS exclude the people living on the street, elst how do you get to where you live? I explained to the cop how this would necessitate my making a huge 12 block square all around the Ventura Blvd./Sepulveda Blvd. intersection, which sits directly under the Ventura Freeway/405 intersection--which, as fate would have it, is one of the ten busiest intersections in America. This when I could have spit on my apartment building from where he had pulled me over.

The cop was about as sympathetic as a dung beetle. I pointed out that he had just made the same illegal turn on his motorcycle when he was in front of me in traffic, and that police cannot break the traffic laws, unless they have sirens on and are enroute to an emergency. This did not enhance the chemistry of our dialogue. The judge was more sympathetic, waving the fine but giving me the points on my license. Still, I wish, in hindsight, that somehow I could have dumped a pile of copperheads somewhere.

I will grant you that this pay-with-pennies example of guerilla marketing/civil disobedience (although technically you aren't even breaking any law) can seem like more hassle than it is worth to the average activist, but it has three distinct advantages:

1.) If you can persuade enough people to do it (and persuasive people have persuaded other people to do some mighty peculiar things), you can effect policy change regarding the matter.

2.) The psychic gratification, the venting process if you will, getting your bile out of your system--it's tremendous.

3.) It functions more as a form of guerilla marketing than civil disobedience. As in, if you can get a news story or internet story done about your penny project, it drives traffic to your website and your cause.

CASE IN POINT: my own personal favorite example of this would have to be the man who paid a \$137 dollar moving violation ticket to his local police department by rendering it in origami pigs made from one dollar bills--137 of them, to be precise, presented in a Dunkin' Donuts box. Get the joke? You can see it for yourselves on YouTube, as have over one million other amused voyeurs. Granted, this man did not seem to have a larger attached cause, but the genius of it is, such a whimsical form of protest--which even got the cops and clerk begrudgingly laughing--is bound to get lots of traffic; this drives people to other videos on your Youtube Subscribe site; hence, instant publicity. Oddly enough, BaconMoose, the perp in question, only has one other video on his Youtube page--you guessed it. How to make origami pigs out of dollar bills. Still, the fact that 1,327,191 people and counting, all viewed this video, speaks to the overwhelming power of guerilla marketing as a way to get people in touch with your cause--in this case, via beloved Youtube,

So, we have seen how some acts straddle the fence; they are both Civil Disobedience and Guerilla Marketing.

But heck, guerilla marketing doesn't have to be strident, nor walk a tightrope across the law. It can be fun, benevolent even. When a famous Hamburger chain decided to give all the first responders free burgers during the Los Angeles 6.6 Northridge Earthquake (and lucky me, I was just a few miles from the epicenter), they got what had to be well over a hundred thousand dollars worth of free publicity for a few days, as various stations ran the news story, announcing the hamburger chain's name on television over and over again, to an audience that was glued to the set for news of the quake. In a curious twist of fate, I'll be damned if I can remember the name of the hamburger chain. But it was almost twenty years ago, and I didn't get a free hamburger. I was holed up in some rubble in my apartment.

And Guerilla Marketing can be creative. One burgeoning example is authorized graffiti. As in, rather than have a drab brick wall, the owner of that wall--be it a small ma

n'pa grocery store, a used book shop, a gallery, whatever--will authorize spectacular graffiti. Then you know how it goes ..."The store is right at the intersection with that great graffiti" ... or, alternatively, even better, people go to see the graffiti, and stay to browse the store.

One of my favorite examples of guerilla marketing is still ongoing, even as I write this, and it comes from a wonderful artist known as Candy Chang, who, after losing a loved one and going through a profound depression, rebounded by securing permission to take over the side of a building in New Orleans that could only be improved by any manner of artistic embellishment.

She created hundreds of repeat stencils which all contained the first half of a sentence: BEFORE I DIE, I WANT TO--" And then, she left behind a great quantity of colored chalk, so that anybody who wanted to could scribble in their response.

She did not anticipate the extent to which the results would pull her out of her depression, make her laugh, make her cry again, give people a chance to vent, draw the neighborhood closer, all the while bringing legions of visitors and tourists to see it.

But perhaps most importantly, on a practical, guerilla marketing level, it helped her to get viral publicity. In her case, you could say that the cause she was promoting via guerilla marketing--and very successfully--was twofold: first, she created a cathartic outlet for anybody who wanted to participate, and secondly, she got publicity for a cause called Candy Chang.

But I see this not as a selfish move; this creative act constitutes one of my favorite things in life: the Win-Win situation. She wins, and the neighborhood wins with an influx of gawkers, participants, and patrons. And the people who vent via chalk get their catharsis, their creative expression, their fifteen minutes of fame. And Candy Chang has just enhanced and expanded her reputation as a contemporary artist.

And now, in a continuation of the Win-Win scenario, Candy Chang has expanded beyond beautiful New Orleans, with walls all over the world, and in a flowering of languages, including Los Angeles, California, Lexington, Kentucky, Carbondale, Illinois, Newark, New Jersey, Kimberly, Canada, Nelson, Canada, London, England, Newtown, New Zealand, Amakusa, Japan, Durban, South Africa:

Among my favorite responses to BEFORE I DIE,

--sing for millions

--hold her one more time

--eat a salad with an alien

--see my daughter graduate

---abandon all insecurities

--plant a tree

--right all my wrongs

- foster a child
- hike the Appalachian trail
- stop all my bullying
- go on a city slicker old west cattle drive
- see my two sons
- master the art of foreplay
- save 1000 lives
- live in a song and dance world for a day
- do too many things
- get off drugs
- have a child
- confront my abusive father
- take care of my mom the way she took care of me
- straddle the International Date Line
- be completely myself
- learn to read
- end racism
- restore my faith in humanity
- witness a miracle
- be tried for piracy
- be famous enough to have a Pez dispenser designed in my image
- have a movie soundtrack scored just for me, and have it played while I live my life.

Yeah.

Candy Chang has made us feel less bottled up, more fully expressed--and most importantly, she has reminded us all that we are not alone. Thanks to passionate people, over three hundred Before I Die walls have now been created in over twenty languages and in over fifty countries, including Kazakhstan, Portugal, Japan, Denmark, Australia, Argentina, and South Africa. They have been a constant source of comfort, therapy, humor, and inspiration.

By the way, for those of you who are beguiled by this idea, but can't get to a wall, she does have a book out that would make a great gift. And no, I don't know her, that's not why I am promoting her project here. I just know how difficult it is to create your own momentum out of the ether, plugging an idea that, in its infancy, is seen as a bit crazy by the world writ large.

Oh, and as for those last two BEFORE I DIE's on her list, about the Pez Dispenser and the movie soundtrack. That's not on any of her walls. Yet. They are my personal BEFORE I DIEs, and BEFORE I DIE, I want to write it on one of her walls.

DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME

No discussion of civil disobedience is complete without a regaling of the Mona Shaw Saga, so before we leave this chapter, I want to end it with her inspiring tale. That having been said, DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME. In fact, DO NOT TRY IT ANYWHERE. When you read the story, you will understand why.

Then again, hell--try it out. Figure out what corporation has screwed you over the worst this week, and then go out into the world today, buy a hammer, and go to town.

The piece of American Theatre that is the Mona Shaw incident is rendered for you below, in a combination of my own storytelling, and excerpting (in italics) a brilliant Washington Post Article by Neely Tucker, entitled "Take a Whack Against Comcast", published October 18th, 2007

Sometimes truly American virtues arise in outlaws who -- by dint of heroic but questionable endeavors -- display the mettle of the national character. For instance: The Dillinger Gang, robbing banks (and destroying mortgages) when banks were foreclosing on the poor. Stephanie St. Clair, matron of the numbers racket during the Harlem Renaissance, striking a (dubious) blow for both gender and racial equality. Junior Johnson bootlegging liquor during Prohibition (the benefits of which were self-evident). Fear not, fellow Americans! In these dark days of war, pestilence and Paris Hilton, a new hero has arisen. She is none other than 75-year-old Mona "The Hammer" Shaw, who took the aforementioned implement to her local Comcast office in Manassas to settle a score, and boy, did she!

But surely, we must ask ourselves--

--What would lead such a sweet senior citizen to commit this act of consumer terrorism.? A little background is in order. Let's start with the fact that Comcast is reviled the world over. They aren't just bad, as is most customer service these days, they have turned bad service into an art form; so egregious and heinous is their customer service that the respected trade magazine Advertising Age wrote a scathing editorial suggesting that Comcast and other cable providers spend less on advertising and more on customer service. And even more damning, Comcast is so vile that it has provoked one disgruntled consumer to create the watchdog website ominously titled comcastmustdie.com; not only did consumers jump on the bandwagon with complaints, but such high profile news outlets as The New York Times, The Washington Post, and Good Morning America covered the site's efforts.

With that as prelude, on to Mona. Eternal optimist that she was, Mona scheduled an appointment with Comcast for installation of the much ballyhooed trifecta service "Triple

Play” which (theoretically) will provide the consumer with Internet, phone, and cable services all bundled. Monday, August 13th, 2007 was the big day. Nobody showed up. Nobody called. Why are we not surprised? Poor, naïve Mona. Finally, at long last, they did show up. Two days later. They didn’t finish their assignment. Taxed by the enormity of the task before them, the butt crack squad left with the job half done. Then, inexplicably, two days after that, Comcast simply cut off all service to Mona and her husband Don.

You have been patient, dear reader. , and your patience will be rewarded. It’s about to get juicy. On the same day that their service was cut off, Mona corralled her husband and they went, in person, down to the local Comcast call center to complain. What you are about to read is unbelievable. Or maybe not:

Mona marches in and insists on speaking with someone in charge. A daffy, addled, perennially smiling secretary says someone will be right with them. (Note those fateful words: “*Right with them.*”) And will Mona and Don go take a seat? Outside, please? Now, what the idiot secretary means, when she says outside, is not outside of anybody’s office, but outside of the building. In the world. In the weather. In the Virginia August heat wave. Again, naively, Mona obeys.

Two hours pass. Not ten minutes, not three quarters of an hour. But two hours. At which point rude idiot secretary leans out and informs them that *the manager has left for the day*. The work day is over. And here is my favorite part: Adds “Thank you for coming.”

The insulting idea that, as Shaw puts it, "they thought just because we're old enough to get Social Security that we lack both brains and backbone." So, after stewing over it all weekend, on the following Monday, she went downstairs, got Don's claw hammer and said: "C'mon, honey, we're going to Comcast. "

Did you try to stop her, Mr. Shaw?

"Oh no, no," he says.

Hammer time! Shaw storms in the company's office. BAM! She whacks the keyboard of the customer service rep. BAM! Down goes the monitor. BAM! She totals the telephone. People scatter, scream, cops show up and what does she do? POW! A parting shot to the phone!

"They cuffed me right then," she says.

Her take on Comcast: "What a bunch of sub-moronic imbeciles."

Being a responsible newspaper, we must note that this is a misdemeanor, a crime, a completely inappropriate way of handling a business dispute.

Noted.

Who among us has not longed for a hammer in this age of incompetent "customer

service representatives," of nimrods reading from a script at some 800-number location, of crumbs-in-their-beards plumbing installation people who tell you they'll grace you with their presence between 12 and 3, only never to show? And you'll call and call and finally some outsourced representative slings a dart at a calendar and tells you another guy will come back between 10 and 2 next Thursday? And when this guy comes, pants halfway down his behind, he'll tell you he brought the wrong part?

And there is nothing, nothing you can do.

Until there! On the horizon! It's Hammer Woman, avenger of oppressed cable subscribers everywhere! (Cue galloping "Lone Ranger" theme.)

"I scared the tar out of some people, at least," she says. "It had never occurred to me to take a hammer to a phone company before, but I was just so upset... After I hit the keyboard, I turned to this blonde who had been there the previous Friday, the one who told me to wait for the manager, and I said, ' Now do I have your attention?' "

It wasn't all fun.

"My blood pressure went up around my ears. I started hyperventilating. They had to call the rescue squad and put me on a litter."

Well, here's how it all shook out. In the blink of an eye, the building was surrounded. There were two police cruisers, a sergeant's car (!), and an ambulance outside. I, personally, cackle every time I envision it. Mona, to her credit, did not take hostages. But another best part of the story is coming up:

Not surprisingly, the judge did not come down hard on Mona. Not at all. Clearly, he felt what we all do at this point: envy, admiration, a smidge of worship. Oh, he's never admitted as much. But you just know he felt that. Mona actually had the stones to do what we all dream of doing. But Mona is not just a dreamer. Mona is not just talk. If you shut your eyes, and listen very hard, you can still hear the echoes of the judge tittering into his robes, as he hands down the sentence: three months suspended sentence for disorderly conduct, a \$345 fine in restitution and a restraining order barring her from the Comcast office for the next twelve months. Like Mona would ever want to visit there again.

The Stepford VP of Comcast pronounced the expected drivel in response to the melodrama. "Truly a unique and inappropriate situation," says Beth Bacha, adding that "nothing justifies this sort of dangerous behavior."

To which I say, hell yes it does. What you did to Mona justifies it. What you do to millions on a daily basis justifies it. But that's just me.

For what it's worth, a few parting words about Mona Shaw. As de factor spokeswoman for the Perennially Abused by Customer Service Buttholes Everywhere, Mona Shaw could not have been a better choice. She's neither a lunatic nor a criminal.

She and her husband of 45 years are both retired, live in a charming suburban cottage, and both look back fondly on lifetime careers in the United States Air Force. Mona was a registered nurse--as in, her usual life calling is to comfort and heal people, not wield hammers in their general direction. Mona is secretary of both her local square dancing club and her local AARP. She has seven rescue dogs that she fosters for her local animal shelter, a major passion of hers. When she is not lifting weights, she is volunteering at their local Unitarian Universalist Church. And *this*, ladies and gentlemen, *this* is the portrait of a modern day consumerist vigilante. Gotta love it.

Two other things you should know: she finally did get phone service--with Verizon. And secondly, always the philanthropist, Mona Shaw had the hammer auctioned off for \$180 dollars, and gave the money to charity. Personally, I think with the right handler, she could have gotten a lot more for that hammer. I know that I had heard about that auction, I would have started quite a bidding war.

And after all, is anybody safe anymore, really? Mona Shaw lives minutes away from a Home Depot. Where they sell hammers.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THERE IS NO EXCUSE:

There is no excuse for not doing your part to change the world. There is no excuse; you **can** make a difference.

Obviously, entire books could be written about how to use the internet to effect social change, and to impact a cause. E-Petitions are becoming one of the most powerful new ways to make countries, states, counties, causes, and corporations reverse their policies. Even a cynic must agree that this works; signature protests usually translate into money not spent by angry and indignant consumers, and boycotts have long been considered a great tool for change. The internet makes petitions go global in the blink of an eye. This global pull means that everything happens at a much faster pace; urgent problems get immediate solutions. No more standing in front of the Piggly Wiggly with your clipboard annoying people. You can do this on your sofa in your sweats at your laptop, for Pete's sake.

Even the laziest among us are out of excuses.

And lest you question whether or not E-petitions actually have an impact on social, political, and economic environments, make no mistake. The evidence is abundant that they do; dig a little, and you will find hundreds of businesses, governments, educational institutions, and a variety of other enterprises caving to the power of the signature, which almost always translates to the power of the almighty dollar. (Or Euro, Pound, Franc, Peso, Yen, Yuan, Rial, Shekel, Ruble, Rupee, Bitcoin, etcetera.)

Even as I write this--literally as I write this--petitions saved that poor giraffe. Surely all of you paying attention must remember how, right around Valentine's Day of 2014, a perfectly healthy giraffe was destroyed by Danish zookeepers, and fed to lions while crowds--including children--watched. Their lame excuse about preserving the genetic integrity of the herd was thin and unconvincing; dozens of viable alternatives were offered that would have guaranteed a full rich life for the young giraffe. Tragic as it was, there seems to be general agreement that it was public outrage, a tsunami of venom on social media sites--and a petition on change.org--that saved the second giraffe. That's something. That's a start.

Go to change.org to get started. It is growing in leaps and bounds*, and will soon be up there with Facebook, Google, YouTube and Twitter, as a powerful and prominent

instrument of social networking. It will create change, just as its name promises.

(Case in point: although change.org is only six years old, it passed the ten million member mark in 2012. In 2011, it was seeing 300,000 new members a month; now it is surpassing two million new members a month. It is now the fastest growing site of its kind. Finally, a social networking site that does some good. Instead of posting pictures of your macramé art or bobble head doll collection, instead of twatting about whatever the hell your X, or the latest x-Disney delinquent is up to, instead of uploading videos of your uglybaby or stoopidpet, you can actually do something to change your little corner of the world.)

Here are a few provocative examples:

--Julia Bluhm, only fourteen years of age, plus 86,440 people who agreed with her and signed her E-Petition, in July of 2012, got Seventeen Magazine and Teen Vogue Magazine to stop photo-shopping their covers, so that teenage girls would stop getting unrealistic and unhealthy ideas about what constitutes beauty and the ideal body.

--Carl Chancellor, plus 8,610 people who agreed with him and signed his E-Petition, on February 11th, 2011, got the Mississippi Governor to veto a license plate that was about to be issued honoring the founder of the KKK, Nathan Bedford Forrest. Similar petitions are now circulating regarding schools, statues, and other structures and signage which are publicly owned and in the public view. Although Forrest is considered by some to be a Civil War hero, his leadership of the Klan during its ultra-violent period (whipping and murdering both black and white voters who did not vote correctly), has been well documented.

--After he and his friends risked their lives for six years fighting fires without any kind of health care, John Lauer, plus 16,631 people who agreed with him and signed his E-petition, in July of 2012, got Obama to direct federal agencies that health insurance would be provided for all those firefighters who fight the blazes in America's wild lands.

--Cynthia Butterworth, plus 800,000 people who agreed with her and signed her E-petition, in September of 2012, convinced Verizon telephone to change its contract cancellation/change policy in the cases of women who are fleeing abusive men. When her sister-in-law ended up in the emergency room, then sought to hide from her abuser, she realized it would cost her five hundred dollars that she did not have to cancel or change her phone contract. And as long as her phone information stayed the same, not only could her abuser track whom she was calling, but even worse, he would know where she was calling from. Verizon got the message, and changed its policy. Jane Doe, and 175,125 people who agreed with her and signed her E-petition, in November of 2012, effected the same changes at Sprint.

--Timothy Rosner, plus 14,000 people who agreed with him and signed his E-petition, in July of 2011, pressured the Wyndham Hotel chain to step-up its efforts to

stop enabling child prostitution. The Wyndham Hotel in San Diego and one in Escondido, for example, actually had staff that was facilitating Crips gang members with posting ads, renting rooms, and running police interference. Amanda Kloer and her fellow 4253 petition signers accomplished the same victory with the Comfort Inn chain in February 2010, after five year old Shania Davis was sold for sex at a Comfort Inn in North Carolina. In April of 2011, confronted with 7474 signatures on a E-Petition, Hilton agreed to the same thing.

--Benoit Coulon, plus 21,467 people who agreed with him and signed his E-petition, on August 16th, 2012, got France TV to air the Para-Olympics, bringing new pride to the disabled community, and new compassion to the country.

--Cruel and Ugly: Headline: BP Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico. News breaks that BP is burning endangered sea turtles alive. A boat captain who has been leading efforts to rescue the endangered turtles says BP has blocked his crews from entering the areas where the animals are trapped, effectively shutting down the rescue operation. BP is using "controlled burns" to contain the oil spill. Shrimp boats create a corral of oil by dragging together fire-resistant booms and then lighting the enclosed "burn box" on fire. If turtles are not removed from the area before the fire is lit, they are literally burned alive. The sea turtle most affected by the Gulf of Mexico oil spill is the Kemp's Ridley, which is listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Parties responsible for killing the endangered turtles are liable for criminal penalties that include prison and civil fines of up to \$25,000 per violation. As a result, BP perversely has a financial incentive to allow the endangered turtles to burn, rather than allow rescue crews to cull them from the burn boxes before the containment fires are lit. ***"They ran us out of there and then they shut us down, they would not let us get back in there,"*** said turtle rescuer Mike Ellis, in an interview with conservation biologist Catherine Craig that was posted on YouTube.com. BUT--thanks to CREDO ACTION, plus 5404 people who agreed with them and signed their E-petition, on July 2nd 2010, BP was forced to sit down with environmental groups and halt this cruel practice being perpetrated on an endangered species.

--Melissa Sehgal, plus 202,962 people who agreed with her and signed her E-petition, in March of 2012, got the worldwide conglomerate Amazon.com to stop selling products containing whale or dolphin meat.

--Bridgett Wright, plus 15,896 people who agreed with her and signed her E-Petition, in February of 2011, made sure that the unrepentant animal torturer and killer Russell Swigart stayed behind bars after serving only two and a half years for torturing and killing her two cats, then detailing the grisly acts in a text to her, then threatening to do the same to her. This was not his first twisted act of cruelty to animals. Previously, he had broken in to another girlfriend's home, taped her cat in a box, then fired a shotgun into it. Previous to that, he had almost tortured a girlfriend's dog to death. Bridgett showed up at

the parole hearing with her petition, spoke of the terror she felt at the thought of him getting out and stalking her, and put Swigart back behind bars where he belongs. Sometimes, it's just about going after the really bad guys, as simple as that.

--Cameron Dunbar-Yamaguchi, plus 1663 people who agreed with him and signed his E-petition, in November of 2011, fought the Fairfax County, Virginia Zoning Board when they ordered National Guard Officer Mark Grapin, away on a tour of duty in Iraq, to dismantle the tree house that he had built for his two sons as "***a promise that he would return to them.***" Amazingly, Grapin had even done something that many of us wouldn't have bothered to do; he called the county and asked about zoning permits before he built it. They said fine, no permit is needed, have a nice day. He then sank nearly two thousand dollars into a sturdy, world class tree house. Then the Board changed its mind, and ordered the tree house torn down. (This is how we treat a veteran and his family?) As a result of Cameron's petition, the tree house still stands.

--Ben Crowther, of Washington University, plus 100 students and faculty who agreed with him and signed his E-petition, in November of 2012, got the notoriously homophobic LIBERTY UNIVERSITY un-invited from their annual Law School Fair. From their petition site: ***Every year Western puts on the Law School Info Fair. This year the infamously homophobic Liberty University was invited to attend. Liberty was founded by none other than Jerry Falwell (the guy who blamed 9/11 on queer people and called a Teletubby "gay", figuring it had to be a homo, as it was purple). Good ol' Jerry's ideology spread to his university. They expel queer students, mark students down for taking pro-gay stances on tests, and encourage reparative therapy, which has been recognized as both ineffective and harmful by the American Psychological Association. Liberty University stands contrary to Western values against hate and discrimination. They will create an unsafe space for queer students, staff, and faculty and their allies, making them a disservice to everyone. Hate is not a Western value. Tell Western not to bring hate to campus and to formally disinvite Liberty from attending the Law School Info Fair.***

--The Polaris Project, plus 6023 people who agree with the project and signed the E-petition, in September of 2010, finally did "the impossible". It has gotten a department in the U.S. Government to stop dragging its feet. The Polaris Project Petition accomplished something with world wide implications, and became a global force for good: they got the Department of Labor to release a list of goods produced by forced labor, child labor, and slave labor, also releasing along with it a list of countries most guilty of said crimes against humanity. It began like this: With the reauthorization of Trafficking Victims' Protection Act (TVPA) in 2005, the Department of Labor was mandated by Congress to compile a list of goods produced by forced labor or child labor and the countries where they were made. Four years passed--and the department had yet to release this list to the public. Enter the Polaris Project. The E-petition is created and

goes viral. And just like that, the list is released. Now all consumers with a conscience have the knowledge and the facts they need in order to do the right thing.

--Martin Methany, plus 1640 people who agreed with him and signed his E-petition, in November of 2010, pressured the Federal Government to step up and pass tough legislation against Crush videos. Crush videos circulate freely in the underbelly of the internet--these are sites that are pseudo traceless and don't list themselves with search engines; you may remember the Silk Road bust. Although it is horrific, and almost beyond imagining to the uninformed, crush films cater to a sick sexual fetish which involves watching the crushing of small animals--mice, bunnies, kittens, puppies--for sexual gratification. A previous ban had been overturned by the Supreme Court, but this tough new law should go a long way towards wiping this ugly sickness out for good. And in case you think this isn't a real problem, or prevalent, or public, imagine this, if you will: as recently as April of this year, 2013, a Houston Judge, the Honorable (!?!?) Sim Lake was in a position to pass sentence over a couple who had made dozens of these "animal snuff films", including one that showed a kitten having its head crushed with a stiletto as the heel gouged through its eyeball, and one in which a puppy who was repeatedly slashed with a meat cleaver, then finally beheaded. The judge's response: he threw out the case, as the snuff films were "protected under freedom of speech and the First Amendment".

CAUTION: EXTREMELY GRAPHIC

<http://www.chinasmack.com/2008/pictures/kitten-killers-return.html>

<http://dayveetlavide.blogspot.com/2011/02/rabbit-killer-sequel->

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SUFFER THE CHILDREN

“To love another person is to see the face of God ...”

-Jean Valjean, Epilogue, Les Miserables

We can learn a lot from kids. Our own kids, our community's kids, our country's kids, kids from all over the world: at the same moment that they make us proud, they shame us.

Because unlike us, they are fearless.

Because unlike us, they have boundless energy--and when that energy is lasered on a good cause, watch out.

Because unlike us, their hearts are not yet jaundiced with cynicism.

Because unlike us, they haven't learned about their own limitations. In fact, they haven't even bought into the notion that there even are any limits to what one person can do. Heck, most kids I know who are under eight are still wearing make-shift capes, fashioned from beach towels and bed sheets, and on some level, they really think they can fly. What's interesting is that most of the kids on this list got started when they were less than eight years old. And they are soaring in a very real way.

CASES IN POINT:

CHARLIE COONS, 13, of Simi Valley, California. When her brother returned home from volunteering in a poverty stricken part of Jordan, Charlie was moved by his stories of poverty beyond her imagining: not enough food or fuel, dirt floors, not enough clothes, hardly any toys. Charlie got a fleece kit to make a blanket, and got her friends and neighbors on board to help out. First it was 50 blankets. Her group HELP (Hope Encouragement Love Peace) has made 700 blankets so far, and she has fanned out to neighboring states, with plans to engage all fifty, then she's going global. She splits her time after school between making blankets, and speaking engagements to spread the word. Apparently, nobody has told her that she is supposed to be terrified of public speaking, the # 1 fear among adults. She cherishes the photo she received from an orphanage of a child clutching the first blanket she made.

GOOGLE IMAGES: Charlie Coons Blankets

TAYLOR AND KENNEDY EVERSON made a plan, after returning from an amazing trip to Kenya, working with the non-profit organization Free The Children. The girls assisted in building a secondary school while they were there, and had a chance to see poverty up close and personal. The twin girls had a ninth birthday coming up, and decided to ask for contributions to Adopt-A-Village instead of the usual gift-wrapped presents, cake, party favors, balloons and streamers. They raised \$2650 dollars, the record for a birthday party, and now they plan to expand to start a Free The Children Campaign in their school. Part of what inspired them: they realized that many of the children they met in Africa don't even know when their birthday is. And will never have a birthday party or a birthday present in their life. And that for one out of five of these children, their life will be over before they are six.

After RACHEL BECKWORTH died from injuries sustained in a car crash near her Bellevue, Washington, home in July of 2011, news of what had been the 9-year-old's birthday wish to raise \$300 to build wells for those in need went viral. Inspired donors have helped fulfill -- and wildly surpass -- her mission by giving more than \$1 million to the non-profit charitywater.org, devoted to bringing clean water to developing nations, which not only saves lives by providing drinking water, but helps fight a range of diseases. Rachel's mom headed to Africa with the nonprofit to see firsthand how her deceased daughter is continuing to save lives. These are the statistics to date: \$1,265,823 has been raised from 31,997 contributors. 143 wells have been built, which have provided 37,770 people with fresh, clean, local water for the first time in their lives.

BLARE GOOCH, 13, Grand Rapids, Michigan. When Blare was watching the news coverage of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, he couldn't shake from his mind the image of a little boy sitting on a pile of rubble, crying. Blare wanted to help. He thought of his favorite teddy bear, and how it had always comforted him. He talked his school principal into making an announcement over the PA. You know what is coming: it went viral. News stories, Facebook, you name it. Over 50,000 teddy bears later, "BLARE'S BEARS FOR HAITI" has given 25,000 stuffed teddy bears to the island nation, and that many again to assorted non-profits. Plans have expanded to collect other toys and much needed school supplies. Blare's words of wisdom: ***"If you're young and think you can't make a big difference in the world, well, you actually can."***

JAYLEN ARNOLD is fighting back against bullying. Born with Tourette's Syndrome, known for its uncontrollable vocal outbursts and ticks, he didn't cower in fear

or let others get the upper hand. Instead the 8 year-old (now 14 in 2014) founded Jaylen's Challenge, and, with a tiny bit of help from his folks, created a campaign to stop school bullying. He started out selling awareness bracelets to raise money. What started locally grew, and one single marathon race sponsored by Disney raised \$57,000 for the cause. In addition to acting and modeling, Jaylen currently holds speaking engagements at Universities, Institutes, and schools nationwide, in order to continue educating the world about Tourette's. Jaylen has just completed filming a documentary for the Discovery Health Channel called "Tourette's Uncovered". He has quite a fan base, too, including the likes of Disney Studios, Anthony Anderson, Sam Waterston, and Leonardo DiCaprio.

EVAN MOSS. Life seems so unfair. Yet why is it that the people whom fate treats most cruelly often seem to be the folks who make the best of things? Evan was born with tuberous sclerosis complex, a form of epilepsy that caused him between 300 and 400 seizures a month. Even after an operation at the age of four reduced the number of seizures, they were still frequent and longer in length. Evan desperately needed a specialty service dog, one trained to detect and warn of seizures before they happen. But Evan's family needed \$13,000 dollars. So Evan wrote and illustrated a book, in which he explained how he imagined it might be when he got his dog. He talked about traveling, feeling more normal, even eating pizza with his dog. The book was an instant success. It hit the top of the Amazon's list of Children's Health Books, and he even became a celebrity at book signings. The book was so successful that Evan was able to fly to Ohio with his family, visit 4 Paws For Ability, and even purchase seven other service dogs for needy kids.

Like all trained seizure dogs, Mindy, a Goldendoodle (half Golden Retriever, half Standard Poodle), can detect small seizures a full twenty minutes before they happen (by detecting subtle signs undetectable by humans), and grand mal seizures a full five hours ahead, allowing Evan plenty of time to get the help he needs. Evan admits that he and his family decided that it would not be healthy for the dog to regularly dine on pizza, but he does have a secret about the dog. The dog's special trick. Evan whispered it to the reporter, on the condition he keep it a secret: *It can play Nintendo DS Pokemon*. Don't tell anybody.

TYLER PAGE is an ordinary kid who, according to his mom, forgets to brush his teeth and leaves a path of his stuff trailing behind him wherever he goes. So she didn't take it too seriously when ten year old Tyler saw an Oprah show about child slavery and he announced he was going to do something about it. He had learned that poor parents in Ghana would sell their children into child slavery for as little as 20 dollars. Many of these children worked on fishing rigs for 14 hours a day, receiving just one meal. Deep diving into dangerous waters, by children as young as three, led to many drowning deaths ...

But Tyler then learned that a mere \$240 per child could end all that hell. Suddenly, the path was not about what he trailed behind, but about blazing ahead: his classmates

and the school liked his carwash idea. He made a little over a thousand dollars. Eighteen months, later, he had raised a little more. \$50,000 a little more. Tyler and his mother talked about starting a foundation, Kid-to-Kid. Mom thought that organizing the group might cut into his fundraising time, but Tyler promptly turned around and raised \$130,000.

Then, the inevitable happened. Inevitable if you know Tyler. Tyler went directly to Ghana, Africa, to talk with the people who were enslaving children. He shamed, bargained, and cajoled them into freeing the kids. Because of Tyler, the children who lived in slave labor--most of them never knowing their mothers, not knowing what a door or a toothbrush is, never having put their head on a pillow--get a whole new lease on life. Like all the stories here, you need to read more details to do honor to this amazing kid's work. But those are the broad strokes. Tyler is fifteen now. Can you imagine what he will have done by the time he's thirty? ***"I plan to do it till I'm 99!"*** says Tyler.

Watch his documentary "Kids For Sale" on Youtube
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taTy9Tf0lzo>

WINTER VINECKI, twelve years old, of Salem, Oregon, came from a family of runners, so it was no surprise when she had run in marathons and triathlons at the age of five, and a 10K by the age of eight. But Winter was not content with just running in marathons; she watched adult competitors and learned about sponsors, and soon she had raised \$1100 dollars towards cancer research. Soon, though, this cause would hit all too close to home: her father was diagnosed with prostate cancer--as will one out of every six men in this country. So Team Winter was formed, and raised over \$100,000 towards her father's treatment and towards cancer research.

Sadly, her father passed away one year after his diagnosis, but Winter remained dedicated to her cause, out of loving memory for her dad. Team Winter has now run into a half a million dollars, literally--and Winter knows in her heart that her father is her own personal guardian angel and is proud of her. At fourteen, she was the youngest person to ever complete a marathon on Antarctica. Machu Picchu is next on the list; her goal is to run a marathon on all seven continents--that is, when she is not excelling as a star student at Stanford University's prestigious online high school. Not surprisingly, Winter, now fifteen, has her eyes on the 2018 Winter Olympics. She is already well known and a record-breaker in the world of winter sports, and one can only imagine to what heights her fundraising will soar, with the whole word--and her father--watching.

RACHEL WHEELER must be one persuasive twelve year old. Most of us were tickled if our bake sale cleared a hundred bucks. Try a third of a million. Bucks. Of course, she was charismatic and savvy enough to partner with local church members and the Chamber of Commerce, but still--a third of a million? And that was just a jumping off

point for her. This Lighthouse Point, Florida citizen recently came back from Haiti, after touring the community of twenty-seven houses and the school that her money built. It's wonderful, she agrees. But now she has plans to build twenty more houses. What inspired this amazing child? When she was nine, her mother took her to a charity meeting about Haiti, and Rachel was horrified to learn that children her age ate cakes made out of pure mud for dinner.

PETER LARSON first slept outside to raise awareness--and money--for homeless families when he was five years old. It was his dad's idea (Peter is never in danger), and what started as a family charity project has spread. Peter learned of a program that helped families have housing year round, through the winter months, for just \$500, so he started setting goals. Last he counted, he and the people he has inspired to "sleep out" with him have raised almost half a million dollars. The even better news is that "sleep-outs" are spreading across the country. Working through his church and his Cub Scout group, Peter has been sleeping outside every year for ten years now, from November 12th through December 31st. Oh--did I mention that Peter hails from ... MINNESOTA! Cripes! This kid is dedicated! In his own words: ***"At some point in your life I think everyone gets called that way, whether it's when you're 5 or when you're 50 or when you're one or when you're 100,"*** he said. ***"At some point you'll get called. It's whether or not you're listening."*** Well? Are *you* listening?

JEFF HANSON first felt the effects of the tumor when he was just a boy of twelve, and he nearly turned blind at seventeen, because of the optic nerve tumor. But Jeff never let the condition interfere with his creativity or determination to help others. Jeff started painting and crafting note cards while undergoing radiation treatment, and in the five years since his diagnosis, Jeff has donated more than \$350,000 from the sale of his work to more than 50 children's health charities. GOOGLE IMAGES JEFF HANSON ART to really do right by Jeff; I prefer his work to most "modern art." Better yet, buy a piece, and support his cause. His goal is one million dollars by his twentieth birthday, which is September 30th, 2013. Ironically, that is the day after tomorrow, as I write this. (For some reason, I occasionally like to give my readers real-time reports.) Fact checking isn't always a drag: Jeff's aforementioned goal came from an older article on the internet. His Facebook page announces the good news: he's now clocking in at over a million bucks to charity.

JANEECE ERDOFF: By the age of 18, she has done more than most of us do in a lifetime. In ten lifetimes. At the age of three, Canadian born Jeneece Edroff was diagnosed with neurofibromatosis type 1, a debilitating genetic disease. Tumors grow from the nerve tissues in her spine, causing her vertebrae to become thin and unsupported. She underwent a series of surgeries, then her parents were told that she would never walk, and would probably not live into her teen years.

Her story could be a book in itself, so here are just the (awesome) facts: not long

after her diagnosis, she ran into her doctor's office and thanked him for helping her to walk again. At the age of seven, she grasped how much this must be costing Variety, the Canadian children's charity that was helping her family. First, the Show of Hearts telethon: \$164 dollars donated. Then, the next year, with the help from a local news anchor, 16 tons of pennies poured in. That's \$27,000 bucks, which was later matched during the next telethon with \$54,000. Then, the official "Jeneece and Friends Coin Drive" upped its take even more: to **1.5 million dollars**, all donated to Variety.

Since then. Jeneece has partnered, spoken publicly, has been titled, and has been given awards and honors for her courage, bravery, stamina and contributions. She has shaved her hair many times in support of children with cancer.

Her most recent triumph and contribution: Jeneece Place, a home away from home for kids and families traveling to Victoria for medical care. Jeneece Place opened on Jan. 20, 2012, Edroff's 18th birthday, allowing 600 families to have a place to call home when they face a medical crisis.

GOOGLE IMAGES: Jeneece Place Victoria bc

Through her passion and incredible spirit, Edroff has inspired Canadians to give more than \$6.7 million. Not bad for a kid who was given such a grim diagnosis. Is there anything the human spirit cannot achieve?

Since that's the last input I will have in this book, I do believe it bears repeating: ***Is there anything the human spirit cannot achieve?***

PARTING SHOTS

"I think it's a Muslim rite for their women to stink like a whale fart from 40 fathoms down after eating last week's roadkill. Just a side note, I've noticed over the past several years that our local Muslim population is rising quickly. One group bought an old Baptist church building next to the interstate and it is now an Islamic Mosque. I do notice the windows upstairs are always open...maybe they already know their women stink?"

"Anyone who reads the Christian Bible, AV 1611 only, knows that our baby Jesus hates the homofags (Ps 5:5) and would much prefer that we isolate them from the rest of society and make their very existence to be a capital punishment. Christians must wholeheartedly celebrate this victory against satan and his homofaggot minions. And we need to continue our work of ridding our communities and our country as a whole

of the homos, Cathlicks, lieberals, and the rest of them heathens. Glory! By Deacon Dixie”

“Obama scum will be out causing trouble ...shoot on sight.”

“I would not whizz on her if she were on fire. -- bossy dog)referring to Michelle Obama, in a thread about the First Lady sitting with a woman from Lynchburg, during Obama’s State-Of[The-Union. This was, of course, sandwiched between many vile remarks about the First Lady.”

“Happy Matin Loofah Coon Day!”

God Help Us All. The End.

