

# B O O K T W O

## Still Time to Learn

*March 14, 1997: Civil Rights Attorney Found Dead*

DREW, Miss. (AP) - A civil rights attorney who was the second black to attend the University of Mississippi was found shot to death at his home, and a judge immediately slapped a gag order on investigators.

Cleve McDowell, 56, was found dead in an upstairs bathroom early Thursday after relatives called police to say the door to his apartment was open and his car missing. Police continued to look for McDowell's Cadillac on Friday.

McDowell had been a public defender in Sunflower County for three decades. He was part of a group of black leaders organizing to pressure district attorneys and revive interest in many never-prosecuted cases in which blacks were killed for doing civil rights work. During the 1980s, McDowell was the executive field director of the Mississippi chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.<sup>i</sup>

*Fifty-five years earlier*

As the years slipped into World War II planters worked harder to claim their dominance lost after World War I by employing prior-used strategies with greater intensity than ever.

The sharecropping system became more oppressive and damaging to families. Law and government, more often used by planters to deny black people their rights and restrict mobility, became more repressive.

Outright terrorism was the glue holding this system together, by means of lynching, daily violence, and resurgence of the Klan and even these measures failed to put down all black resistance. As more African Americans either fought back personally or left the Delta entirely, planters tried using “welfare capitalism” to entice workers to remain in the South. Behind such paternalism was always the threat of terror.

## Chapter 9 Mississippi Stories

“You will have to see the mass of disfranchised, frightened Negroes in the Mississippi Delta to understand what it is to be without freedom.” Dr. Clinton C. Battle addressing an NAACP freedom rally in 1958.

So many brutal events occurred in the Delta over the years; some stories have been documented formally but so many others have passed orally through the generations: Fourteen-year-olds Charlie Lang and Ernest Green were hanged in Clarke County from the Shubuta Bridge over the Chickasawhay River on October 10, 1942. Lang and Green were playmates with a young white girl and when a passing motorist saw them chasing the girl, they were jailed on charges of attempted assault. A mob stormed the Quitman jail, taking the boys, and their bodies were found hanging from the river’s bridge.<sup>ii</sup>

One week later, Howard Wash was lynched in Laurel. A jury had convicted Wash of killing his dairyman employer but had not recommended death. “The U.S. attorney general ordered the FBI to investigate the lynchings, promising that if the investigation developed a case, ‘relentless prosecution will follow.’” No one was convicted.<sup>iii</sup>

Rev. Isaac Simmons, 66, was abducted by six white men in Amite County on March 2, 1944, and killed with three shots into the back. His relatives discovered that Simmons’ tongue had been cut out. Simmons had not been charged with murder or with the “unmentionable crime.” Simmons was lynched because he was a successful black man intent on keeping his property – 220 acres of debt-free land, historian John Dittmer wrote.

In the Delta, Leon McTatie was lynched in Lexington (Sunflower County) on July 22, 1946; the three children of Thomas Harris were murdered in nearby Kosciusko on January 9, 1950; and Henry Randle was murdered in Holmes County in July of 1954.<sup>iv</sup>

THE VIOLENCE WAS inescapable. As public, segregated transportation became an issue for WWII soldiers during the war years, for instance, their family

members were forced to sit in segregated waiting areas and seats of the trains and buses, waiting to see off their loved ones, or waiting for their return, according to Delta lore:

In Winona, Turner E. Brown, 26, was whipped for refusing to say “yes sir” to a bus driver on the Tri-State bus line. Mrs. Eva Williams Turner filed a civil liberties suit against the same bus line when she was thrown off a bus for refusing to sit in the “colored” section. Rev. Harry Bartie, in 1942, asked for information regarding a bus schedule and a ticket agent beat him up. Bartie sued for \$10,000 against the bus company.

W. H. Blackman, also a minister, sued for \$11,000 in damages after the manager of a gas station in Mount Olive struck him with a wrench; Blackman had stopped at the station to buy milk for his baby.<sup>v</sup>

MOST OF MISSISSIPPI’S revered white politicians were vicious racists since early on they had resolved this was the only way to get elected – whether or not they actually believed their own racist words.

Senator Theodore Gilmore Bilbo, former governor and the son of a farming Baptist minister, won a hard-fought U.S. Senate race in 1934. Part of a populist revolt against the state’s patrician power structure, Bilbo was fiercely racist. Once during the radio program “Meet the Press,” Sen. Bilbo admitted his membership in the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>vi</sup>

Hodding Carter knew about Bilbo “The Man,”<sup>vii</sup> well before leaving Louisiana. Because of Carter’s national reputation for Huey Long-baiting, he might have been strategically wooed to Greenville to help the Percy family, a Mississippi political dynasty, mitigate – at least publicly – the effects of Bilbo and other extremists.

In Washington, D. C. on the floor of the Senate, Bilbo frequently advocated deportation of blacks to Africa, once called Congresswoman Claire Booth Luce a “nigger lover,” and praised Adolf Hitler.<sup>viii</sup> Senator Bilbo humiliated most of Mississippi’s elite, and yet they kept returning him to office.

As one of the most zealous white supremacist ever to serve in the U. S. Senate, Bilbo declared that whites were “justified in going to any extreme to keep the nigger from voting.”<sup>ix</sup>

WHAT HODDING CARTER AND most other Deltans did not recognize was Bilbo’s close relationship to a Northern outside organization with direct Nazi

ties, a liaison that began only two years after Bilbo first arrived in Washington, D. C. but would impact all of Mississippi for years to come and remains covertly so.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars flowed from this outside organization into Mississippi to advocate racism, fight against civil rights, establish private segregated schools, and oppose the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>x</sup> Yet as of 2005, this Draper story was yet to be reported by major Mississippi media and historians.

Perhaps it was Bilbo's constant reference to blacks as "nigger[s] ... from the jungles of Africa [where it was their] delight to cut up some fried nigger steak for breakfast" that first caught the ear of Earnest Sevier Cox, a white supremacist propagandist who secretly worked for Wycliffe Draper, a wealthy New York City recluse with Nazi ties and a record of paying for research that tried to "prove" that whites were superior to blacks.

Draper had old Kentucky blood on one side of the family and old Puritan stock on the other. Born in Massachusetts in 1891, he inherited a multimillion-dollar textile fortune in the early 1920s and never worked at a job other than military service in World War I and World War II. Draper's inheritance that his father accumulated and managed was left to the stewardship of Guaranty Trust, which later became Morgan Guaranty, important to remember when tracking down the movement of Draper money funneled into Mississippi and laundered by the state.<sup>xi</sup>

A fanatic Howard Hughes-type recluse for his day, Draper lived in a lavish Upper Manhattan apartment stuffed with big-game trophies he shot on trips to exotic parts of the world. But Draper had other interests as well, and in the mid-1920s, he started supporting the causes of eugenics, a pseudo science, and "racial purity." At his death in 1972, "Draper's money had become the most important and perhaps the world's only funding source for scientists who still believed that white racial purity was essential for social progress."<sup>xii</sup>

In 1935, Draper<sup>xiii</sup> attended the Nazi's International Congress for the Scientific Investigation of Population Problems in Berlin chaired by Wilhelm Frick, who was later convicted during the Nuremberg war-crimes tribunal and hanged in 1946.<sup>xiv</sup> Draper's conference companion, Dr. Clarence C. Campbell, gave a speech declaring, "The difference between the Jew and the Aryan is as unsurmountable (sic) as that between black and white," and closed by hand saluting, "That great leader, Adolph Hitler!"

Eugenics, Draper's life-long interest, actually began as a breeding science for horses in the late 19th century. Then in the early 1900s, two Southern states, North

Carolina and Virginia, used it to control the population of humans that were deemed inferior through mental illness, retardation and handicap. Hitler's Nazi Germany had expanded its use to control the population of those deemed unfit or unnecessary people including gypsies, indigents, slaves, and Jews.<sup>xv</sup>

Draper and his friends, eugenicists Harry Laughlin and Frederick Osborn, founded the Pioneer Fund in 1937 for the purpose of carrying forth the eugenics message. A proposed Pioneer budget for the first year mentioned “two German films referred to by Colonel Draper” including “The Hereditary Defective,” shown at 28 U.S. high schools through Laughlin's efforts.

Draper continued seeking ways to use his money to further science that focused on racial themes, including the funding of a special printing of Earnest Sevier’s racist tract, "White America," used by the Army War College in training officers for positions of high command. This also was sent to every member of Congress and state legislators in Mississippi and North Carolina with the message: “Pigmentation affects the skin only; white civilized culture is the product of the mind's mastery over things material and spiritual. It so happens that white skin accompanies the culturally capable, while black skin accompanies the culturally deficient.”<sup>xvi</sup>

Dr. William Tucker, a psychology professor at Rutgers University, took a hard look at Draper – including Draper’s underwriting of the racist tract "White America," his support for sending black Americans back to Africa, his promotion of a eugenics movement, and Draper’s radical racial politics, including his influence in Mississippi.

As the author of *The Funding of Scientific Racism: Wycliffe Draper and the Pioneer Fund*, Tucker suggests Draper was “undoubtedly horrified at the prospect of social and political equality for blacks [and] opened wide his purse strings between the late 1950s and his death in 1972, pouring huge amounts of money into various anti-integration projects conducted by some of the most ardent racists.”<sup>xvii</sup>

Three years after Bilbo and Cox first met, the senator introduced his Greater Liberia bill to Congress in 1939. In support, Mississippi’s state legislature went on record promoting federal aid “for Negroes who desire to live in a Negro nation,” and advising negotiation with France and Great Britain for large areas of land adjacent to Liberia to widen the borders of that country.

Payment for these lands was to be “credited upon debts owed by France and Great Britain to the United States.” But Bilbo’s legislation was not assigned to a committee.

When Bilbo announced plans to run for a third Senate term, Hodding Carter editorialized that Bilbo “sought public office with sickening regularity.” Sometimes it seemed as if Bilbo was running against Carter.<sup>xviii</sup>

Mississippi’s most powerful senator, James O. Eastland, also had a relationship with Draper.<sup>xix</sup> “Bilbo’s understudy [Eastland] and successor in the Senate as Mississippi’s chief defender of separatism” served on a committee that distributed Draper’s money to scientific recipients.<sup>xx</sup>

Eastland, a wealthy Sunflower County attorney and planter, was hailed by many of his white followers yet seen by one of his Mississippi cohorts as a “vituperative racist.”<sup>xxi</sup> But Rep. Frank Ellis Smith, a white six-term U.S. representative from the Delta and known as the public official who favored James Meredith's entry to the University of Mississippi, said Eastland often “stirred up the racism” wherever he could run into it.

“He used it from the time that I went to Congress, even before then. That was what he wanted to symbolize, the resistance to any change in the racial picture in the Delta.”<sup>xxii</sup>

Near the end of World War Two, Eastland, for no apparent reason, stood in front of Congress and declared that black soldiers were an “embarrassment” to the country and were “an utter and abysmal failure.”<sup>xxiii</sup>

More than 85,000 black soldiers had served in the armed forces during the War, and nearly all had experienced overt discrimination. But Eastland, despite positive reports from the U. S. military, said that black soldiers were “lazy, irresponsible, and of very low intelligence” and had “deserted their posts at crucial times” and “refused to fight.”

Black soldiers, Senator Eastland said, “raped white women” while in Europe and “disgraced the flag of their country.”

One year before, Eastland and Representative John Rankin, a noted Mississippi racist and also considered to be pro-Nazi,<sup>xxiv</sup> worked together against black soldiers – this time, halting adoption of a federal ballot for soldiers in the field, using this as an opportunity to suppress the black soldier vote (a problem that is still unresolved and that resurfaced years later in the 2000 election of George Bush).<sup>xxv</sup>

When the senior senator blasted black soldiers, Hodding Carter responded editorially that Eastland had done a “disservice both to the tinderbox of race relations and to historical truth.” Soon afterwards, Carter was in Maine when Columbia University in May 1946 announced the Delta journalist had won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing “on the subject of racial, religious, and economic intolerance.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

The following year, a concerted effort was made to exclude Bilbo from the Senate for allegedly accepting gifts from war contractors and illegally intimidating Negroes in Democratic primaries. Bilbo “The Man” died before a decision was reached.

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<sup>i</sup> Associated Press, "Civil Rights Attorney Found Dead," *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, March 14, 1997.

<sup>ii</sup> Dittmer, 15.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Cobb, 213.

<sup>v</sup> Woodruff, 219. Cites *Atlanta Daily World*, October 1, 1942.

<sup>vi</sup> Eric Black, "Mother of all talk shows; 50 Years of Meet the Press," *Star Tribune*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 11, 1997.

<sup>vii</sup> The story is told in Mississippi that when critics attacked Mississippi in his day, Theodore G. Bilbo said, "Keep your big nose out of Mississippi" and that's why he is remembered as *The Man*.

<sup>viii</sup> Anonymous, "Death of a Demagogue," *American Heritage*, July-August 1997, 99-100.

<sup>ix</sup> William H. Tucker, "The Funding of Scientific Racism: Wycliffe Draper and the Pioneer Fund," (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 34.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid. Cites Lombardo, Paul A. "The American breed: Nazi eugenics and the origins of the Pioneer Fund," *Albany Law Review*, March 22, 2002; William H. Tucker, "A closer look at the Pioneer Fund: response to Rushton," (J. Philippe Rushton, *Albany Law Review*, vol. 66, 2002, 207)," *Albany Law Review*, June 22, 2003; Yet as of March 2005, the Draper story was still yet to be reported by Mississippi media and Mississippi historians.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>xiii</sup> Kevin Begos, "Against Their Will: North Carolina's Sterilization Program," *Winston-Salem Journal*, 2002. A relative to Wycliffe Draper, William Draper, in 1932 financed the International Eugenics Congress and helped select Ernst Ruaudin, a "fascist Swiss psychiatrist," as chief of the world eugenics movement. They worked closely with Prescott Bush, grandfather of George H. Bush, who shared the same views on eugenics. In Prescott's first run for office in 1950 he was exposed as an activist in the fascist eugenics movement. Due to the exposure, Prescott lost his first bid for office.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xvi</sup> Earnest Sevier Cox, "White America: The American Racial Problem as Seen in a Worldwide Perspective," (Richmond: White America Society, 1937) from Chapter 13, Revised Edition.

<sup>xvii</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>xviii</sup> Waldron, 162.

<sup>xix</sup> Eastland, first appointed a U. S. Senator from Mississippi as a Democrat to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Pat Harrison, served from June 30, 1941, to September 28, 1941. He was elected to the Senate in 1942 and reelected in 1948, 1954, 1960, 1966, and 1972, serving until his resignation December 27, 1978; he was not a candidate for reelection in 1978. He served as President Pro Tempore of the Senate during the Ninety-second through the Ninety-fifth Congresses, and was Chairman of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary (Eighty-fourth through Ninety-fifth Congresses). Source: U. S. Senate Biographies (online).

<sup>xx</sup> Tucker, 67.

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<sup>xxi</sup> By Eastland's account, only "the purest of white blood" flowed through the Eastland family veins: "I know that the white race is a superior race. It has ruled the world. It has given us civilization. It is responsible for all the progress on earth." Eastland, the only child of Woods O. and Alma Austin Eastland, was a fifth generation Mississippian. His father's family migrated from the hills of Tennessee and his mother came from one of Mississippi's most blue-blooded families.

<sup>xxii</sup> Oral history with Frank Ellis Smith. Interviewer, Yasuhiro Katagiri, Fulbright scholar, August 27, 1993, University of Southern Mississippi [Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage](#). Frank Smith grew up in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta and the senseless murder of his deputy sheriff-father by a crazed gunman and subsequent efforts of his mother to rear her family in the Great Depression, gave Smith an idea of "what it was like to struggle for survival even as he resolved to sail against the wind." (Dennis J. Mitchell, "Mississippi Liberal: A Biography of Frank E. Smith," Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001, ix.)

<sup>xxiii</sup> Waldron, 150. Eastland's charges of poor soldiering actually harkened to southern historical "accounts" of black soldiers fighting "poorly" for the Union during the Civil War. When Northern accounts speak of their bravery, southern accounts provided by authors such as Shelby Foote often report a much different story asserting, for instance, that black soldiers only cut and ran.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *The Congressional Record*, Washington, D. C., November 28, 1947. At the time of the Nuremberg trials, U. S. Rep. John E. Rankin wrote that the events unfolding at Nuremberg were a disgrace for the United States. He said that all the other countries had washed their hands of what he regarded as an orgy of persecution, and withdrawn from it. He maintained that a racial minority (Jews and communists) was in Nuremberg, two years after the end of the war, not only to hang German soldiers but also to judge German businessmen in the name of the United States.

<sup>xxv</sup> Charles P. Roland, "An American Iliad: The Story of the Civil War," (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. 1991), 196; *Readers Companion to American History*, "Elections," ed. Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991) 338; "Should Soldiers Have the Vote? They Say Yes Congress Maybe," *The Nation* (December 6, 1943), 54.

<sup>xxvi</sup> "G.I. Wants Justice," *Vineyard Gazette*, July, 1945.