Excerpts From Who Killed Emmett Till
By Susan Klopfer

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Delta Photo Gallery http://mygalleryplace.com/delta

This book is dedicated to Eight Mississippi Delta Civil Rights Martyrs -- Joe Pullen, Rev. George Lee, Lamar Smith, Emmett Till, Birdia Keglar, Adlena Hamlett, Jo Etha Collier and Cleveland McDowell. Written Especially For My Granddaughter, Grace Sophia Klopfer.

Table of Contents

This book was first written as a blog. All chapters are “posts” which have been reversed so that the book reads in chronological order.

Prologue, 6

Introduction: The Delta, 8

Blog Posts: 1-28

Post #1: Early Life in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta; a Land of 'Runaway Slaves Horribly Disfigured By Their Cruel Masters', p. 13

Post #2: African American Enslaved Built Mississippi; 'Maroons' Found Asylum in a Swamp Community Known as 'Africa', p. 17

Post #3: Delta Rife With Violence During Reconstruction, p. 23

Post #4: Mississippi Lynching Becomes 'Theatrical Spectacular’, p. 34

Post #5: The Marcus Garvey Movement Awakened Race Consciousness: The Delta Would Have Changed For Better, Had Garvey Succeeded, p. 41

Post #6: I was in the middle of posting to this blog book when... , p. 48

Post #7: Murder of Joe Pullen, "Another Civil Rights Movement Watershed — Like the Elaine Massacre", p. 49

Post #8: Emmett Till's Casket Acquired By Smithsonian and My Reaction Thursday, August 27, 2009, p. 54

Post #9: Mississippi flood of 1927, Continued Violence and Government Failure Disrupt the Delta; Scientists, Theologians, Journalists, Communists Try to Help, p. 55

Post #10 U.S. Rep. Benjamin Thompson Seeks Atty. General's Probe in Sumner, p. 64

Post #11 "Emmett, Down In My Heart" — the 1955 Lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till in the Mississippi Delta, p. 65

Post #12 Remembering and Honoring Memories of Emmett Till and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., p. 66

Post #13: Mississippi Mau Mau; Veterans Return Home From World War II, p. 67

Post #14 Tallahatchie County: Long Known For Civil Rights Violence and Frequent Klan Encounters, p. 81

Post #15 "A Child Shouldn't Have To Be Scared, p. 83

Post #16: Tallahatchie Manhunt, Booze, Guns, Dogs and More, p. 89

Post #17 Brown I, Brown II and Three Mississippi Murders, p. 90

Post #18 Update: Manhunt Rumors Haunt Mississippi Town With Troubled, p. 95

Post #19 "Negroes Up North Have No Respect For People" — "It's a Shame Emmett Till Had To Die So Soon" , p. 97

Post #20 Sumner, Miss., Milam/Bryant Murder Trial; 'First Great Media Event of the Civil Rights Movement' , p. 104

Post #21 Sumner, 'a Good Place to Raise a Boy': The Emmett Till Murder Trial, p. 109

Post #22 Cemetery Where Emmett Till Buried; Handed Back to Owners, p. 119

Post #23 Still Another Unsolved Mississippi Murder? Cleve McDowell Investigated Delta Murder Victims, Including Emmett Till, p. 120

Post #24 The Autopsy of Cleveland McDowell, p. 128

Post #25 Miss. Reporter Fought Racism; Jerry Mitchell, Wins MacArthur Award, p. 141

Post #26 Burr Oak, New Overseers; Emmett Till's Grave Unharmed, p. 142

Post #27 Sick and Tired of Being Sick & Tired of Racist Remarks By Glenn Beck, p. 143

Post #28 Final Post: The Beginning or the End?, p. 145

Epilogue, p. 168
Afterword, p. 171
Questions & Answers, p. 171
Acknowledgements, p. 178
About the Author, p. 178
Endnotes, p. 179
Extended Bibliography, p. 188
Index, p. 199

Prologue

"I think that every time a man stands for an ideal or speaks out against injustice, he sends out a tiny ripple of hope."

Aaron Henry, Mississippi civil rights leader

IN THE HOT SUMMER before the cold winter in which our nation entered the second world war to end all wars, two boys were born two weeks apart; one in Illinois and the other in Mississippi.

They would never meet but both were murdered at different times in their lives, in and near the cotton-ginning town of Drew in Sunflower County, the heart of the Mississippi Delta. Each would have his place in this country’s civil rights movement.

Fourteen-year-old Emmett Till of Chicago was kidnapped in the early morning hours of August 28 in 1955. The young man was visiting Mississippi relatives in a small cotton hamlet known as Money, a tiny community spread out on a patch of dirt under very old oak trees with several homes, a few businesses and a red brick church house with a humble graveyard near it.

Accused of whistling at a white store owner's wife, Emmett Till was kidnapped and taken to a plantation owner's tool shed at the edge of Drew where he was tortured and possibly killed. His body was hauled by truck to the edges of another small town, Glendora, anchored with barbed wire to a 75-pound metal, cotton gin fan and thrown into the Tallahatchie River.

The sight of Till's brutalized body in an open pine box casket was shown to thousands of mourners in Chicago a week later, after being returned home from the Delta. And this display pushed many who had been content to stay on the civil rights sidelines directly into the fight.

Young Emmett Till's body showed the world the racial problems belonging to the United States, and gave a new voice for victims of racial injustice.

Among those moved to action was civil rights activist Rosa Parks of Montgomery, Alabama who, at the age of 42, refused to obey a city bus driver's order that she give up a forward seat to make room for a white passenger.

Her action came twelve weeks after an all-white Mississippi jury, after sixty-seven minutes of deliberation, acquitted J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant of the murder of Emmett Till. She was not the first activist to make this move. There had been other attempts. But Parks had been planning her personal protest, and along with the NAACP knew the right time had arrived.

Some 42 years later, Cleveland McDowell of Drew, a life-long Mississippi attorney and a minister, whose career was unquestionably defined by Till's brutal murder, was shot to death in his home. As a foot soldier in the modern civil rights movement, sparked by the death of Emmett Till, McDowell became a friend to hosts of civil rights leaders including Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. , Rev. Jesse Jackson, Fannie Lou Hamer and Medgar Evers.

In 1963, McDowell became the first black student admitted to the University of Mississippi law school, following in the footsteps of his mentor, James Meredith. All of his professional life, McDowell secretly tracked details of race-based murders, including Till's lynching, while keeping in touch with Emmett's mother in Chicago. McDowell was only fifty-six years old when he was gunned down.

Introduction: The Delta

A river is a living soul that flows along, continually picking up and dropping off tiny pieces of rock and dirt from its bed throughout its length. Where the river slows, more are dropped than picked up and this becomes a place of alluvial soil or a flood plain. Such regions are the stuff of agricultural wealth — at least for the landowners who make their riches from healthy crops and the physical labor of others.

Nearly 18,000 years ago a continental glacier covered North America. As the frozen waters melted, the Mississippi River and its tributaries carved valleys and created flood plains giving birth to what is technically the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, an agricultural flood plain so filled with rich alluvial soil that you can smell the money through the morning mist.

"Yazoo" is of Native American origin, meaning "River of Death." As evening comes to the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, there is dampness in the air. When cotton is at its peak, if you take a deep breath, there is a smell that comes from just below the damp topsoil, an unsettling scent for those who know the region's history of enslavement and inhumanity. It fills one's nostrils as if cruelty has no trouble finding a direct pathway to the brain. Some who have spent time in the Delta, and who know its stories, say that ghosts of martyrs rise from the rich dirt's faint mist.
+ + +

THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA is not a place I would have picked to live and if you had asked me a few years ago what I knew about the region, it would have been a puzzle since I knew nothing of its history or culture — I'd never even heard of the Delta Blues.

My husband, Fred, was hired by a private group to be the mental health director for inmates in Mississippi's state-run prisons, and so our lives took on a new dimension as we made a small, red-brick house on the grounds of Parchman Penitentiary our new Sunflower County home, in the heart of the Delta.

Eventually, I would enjoying smelling the richness of the alluvial soil and appreciate where we had been dropped. But not the afternoon of my arrival.

The air conditioning was broken and the house had not been cleaned by maintenance crews. There were cobwebs in every corner, dirt on the floor and it was at least 100 degrees plus beastly humid in the shade.

I was madder than hell when I arrived because the car broke down in Oklahoma, putting our three cats and myself into a dilemma. Fred had been living in Jackson, the state capitol, for a month and could only help problem solve by telephone as we drove in from Nevada.

One thing I learned following my self-serving fit of anger was that prisoners don't ever have air conditioning at Parchman, except in the hospital unit. All of the historic brick and buildings were replaced years ago by metal construction and the prisoners were living in what amounted to bake ovens. They were living in hell.

Summer left and on cooler fall mornings, I watched out the front window of our new home through the leaves of mature pecan trees as several prisoners at a time trotted rescue and misfit horses into the ripe cotton fields. They earned this privilege, working

with a unique horse-care program, and I wondered how much it would hurt to enjoy and then relinquish such freedom when evening came.

One year before we arrived, Mississippi's Department of Archives and History, upon court order, made its second release of an online full-text version of the state's secret Sovereignty Commission records. The commission operated as a private spy agency from 1956 to 1972 within the state government, with a mission to investigate and halt all integration attempts. The commission's second goal was to make Mississippi look good to the world, despite the frequent beatings and murders of its black citizens and outsiders who came into the state, trying to end racial violence and discrimination, and reinstate voting rights.

The year we moved to Mississippi, the FBI began re-examining the murder of Emmett Till and would exhume his body the following summer as one of more than 100 unsolved civil rights cold cases that occurred prior to 1969.

Fred came from a liberal, big-city family and could recall hearing his parents talk about Till when he was a child growing up in Oregon. Raised in a small eastern Oregon town, in a more conservative family, I had never heard the story. But even Fred did not recognize that we were living in the epicenter of the Land of Emmett Till.

The story of this young man murdered in a small, nearby cotton hamlet began to resurface when his body was exhumed and examined in June of 2005 by the Cook County medical examiner's office. While eating catfish and greens in Drew's Main Street restaurant, we listened in as some Delta people, black and white, talked quietly about what was happening.

Who would not be interested in this story? Soon, I was spending more and more hours in Walter Scurlock's restaurant listening and then driving around the Delta, trying to piece together the stories I was gathering. Many older black people quickly warmed to my questions and soon shared their secrets of relatives and others who were brutalized and sometimes killed over the years.

And as they told their stories, it was as if these crimes had just taken place. Most white people, on the other hand, didn't seem to want to share what they knew unless they had been actively involved in the movement. Or they simply didn't know the history.

Mississippi's William Faulkner once wrote "The past is never dead, in fact, it's not even past."

And in true Faulknerian spirit, the people who wanted to talk to me were soon sharing their stories as though it were yesterday. Some had kept lists of up to thirty names, passed through their families, of people who had "disappeared." Others told stories of their own involvement in trying to bring change.

I spent time looking through yellowed files in small-town libraries, museums and newspaper offices seeking records of any kind to expand my knowledge; some records were so delicate and uncared for, they crumbled in my hands and I had to quickly put them down so they would not be ruined.

But the best history came directly from the people who talked to me — men and women wanting to examine what they experienced or had heard during some of the worst years of Mississippi's civil wrongs.

Who Killed Emmett Till?

Emmett Till's story has its roots in Mississippi's early history, when kidnapped and enslaved Africans were brought into the Delta, forced to clear swamps, and plant and harvest cotton under the vilest conditions.

In 1975 Professor James Loewen tried to help his Tougaloo College students go to these roots for understanding the Till story, and other history, when he co-wrote the first revisionist state-history textbook in America, winning the Lillian Smith Award for "best nonfiction about the South."

But Loewen had to sue the state to make Mississippi: Conflict and Change even available to public schools. We can hope that today's Mississippi historical gatekeepers won't let this happen again.

From Loewen and others, there appear to be three major themes surrounding Mississippi's civil rights history. First, few of Mississippi's thousands of race-based murders can be seen as isolated events, including the slaying of Till. These atrocities fit into a larger pattern reflective of the region's brutal society formed even before statehood.

Secondly, there were powerful forces outside of Mississippi contributing money and other resources to keep the evil flowing — from Northern people who had always profited from enslavement and discrimination in one way or another.

More than three fourths of the cotton consumed by British mills during antebellum years came from the American South via New England mills and New York businesses that marketed and shipped the cotton overseas.

Northern banking interests supported the slave trade. Slave ships built and outfitted in New England sailed to Africa right up to the Civil War. Twelve million Africans would be shipped to the Americas from the 16th to the 19th centuries; with an estimated 645,000 enslaved brought to what is now the United States.

Interestingly, Mississippi state records show most money collected and spent by Mississippians to fund and sustain the fight against the 1964 Civil Rights Act and to

develop Mississippi's private, segregated academies or schools, came from outside of Mississippi. Money came from Northern business concerns and was moved through a Northern bank. Significant help came from a famous publisher, William "Bill" Loeb III, publisher of the Manchester Union Leader newspaper in New Hampshire and from Morgan Guaranty Trust.

Thirdly, some of the people involved in bringing change to their state have simply been forgotten or still undiscovered by historians. Cleve McDowell, Jo Etha Collier, Birdia Keglar and Adlena Hamlett, Lamar Smith, Rev. George Lee, Joe Pullen, and so many others unnamed, have earned their place in history.

Why does Mississippi's history matter today?

Some believe the modern civil rights movement began with Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott. Others mark this date as the murder of Emmett Till. But no mass movement starts all of a sudden. Before the Civil War began and well into the 1940s and early '50s, many years before the modern civil rights movement made the pages of the white press and then television, there were brave souls trying to right wrongs. They worked in the North and they tried their best from inside "the belly of the beast"—Mississippi.

With today's increased racism and discrimination, especially following the election of this country's first black president, we would all be well served to watch closely as Mississippi attempts to transcend from a state denying some of the worst mental and physical atrocities against kidnapped Africans and African Americans in this nation, to a state accepting its history and seeking clues that explain the functions of racism and discrimination.

Mississippi's newly announced History in the Classroom program is the outgrowth of a state law passed in 2006. Statewide implementation is planned for the 2010-2011 school year, following an unsuccessful legislative effort to eliminate the plan entirely in 2009.

It will be an interesting journey to follow as Mississippi moves along, and a process from which to learn.
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Post #1: Early Life in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta; a Land of 'Runaway Slaves Horribly Disfigured By Their Cruel Masters

Delta attorney Cleve McDowell's father and his grandmother loved to tell family stories, and as a child McDowell learned early family history and how his kin survived as enslaved Africans. He eventually inherited the role as his family's record-keeper and was

so thorough, he was often asked by unrelated friends and neighbors in his hometown of Drew, in Sunflower County, to help sort out their own family roots, his sister said.

“They knew everybody, their families and everything that had happened to them. My father’s own mother, a former slave, lived to be near 100, too. She could remember back to the Civil War. Her name was Sally McDowell and she hid in the chimney when the Yankees liberated that area. I think they were in Arkansas at the time,” Cleve McDowell said in an oral interview given in 1997, one year before he was murdered.1

What was life like for those who picked the cotton? For McDowell’s relatives and others, a glimpse comes from the writings of Charles Dickens who visited Mississippi at the age of 29.

In January of 1842 Dickens sailed from Liverpool on the Steamship Britannia bound for America. At the height of his popularity in both countries, Dickens had taken a year off from writing, determined to visit the young nation “to see for himself this haven for the oppressed which had righted all the wrongs of the Old World.”2

Dickens was soon disenchanted as he traveled down the Mississippi River viewing the cotton fields from the deck. In American Notes, the book he wrote after returning home to England, Dickens made scathing comments about the institution of slavery, citing newspaper accounts of “runaway slaves horribly disfigured by their cruel masters.”

The famous English writer would later observe: “This is not the Republic I came to see … This is not the Republic of my imagination … The more I think of its youth and strength, the poorer and more trifling in a thousand respects, it appears in my eyes. In everything of which it has made a boast … it sinks immeasurably below the level I had placed it upon.”

As the visiting writer made his trip from Memphis, Tenn., down the Mississippi River, it was the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta where he could so closely see the inhumanity of slavery.

MOST MISSISSIPPIANS KNOW that saying “the Delta” refers to Mississippi’s region of flat farming lands, reaching from the Chickasaw Bluffs below Memphis to the Walnut Hills above Vicksburg, Miss., a unique expanse of great wealth and greater poverty. It is common to hear a person from Mississippi say they are from “the Delta.” The word “Yazoo” is left out.

Few could describe the Delta more eloquently than David Cohn, a popular white writer coming from the region who wrote, “The Mississippi Delta begins in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel in Memphis and ends on Catfish Row in Vicksburg.”

Cohn painted the Delta as a land of excess: “The hot sun, the torrential rains, the savage caprices of the unpredictable river. The fecund earth, the startling rapid growth of vegetation, the illimitable flat plains, and the vast dome of heaven arching over all of

them: these environmental influences almost seemed to breed in the people a tendency toward the excessive."3

Even with a century of clearing, cultivating, draining and land leveling, the Delta's earthy beauty stands out at sunset when the sun's burnt orange rays press into murky waters of swamps, bayous, and oxbow lakes. Ripe cotton fields blanket the Delta like soft snow. Wheat, rice and sorghum crops are separated by large and very shallow catfish farm ponds, often outlined by flocks of dinner-seeking and protected snow-white egrets.

The handsome birds were once imported to the Delta for their perfect hat feathers, but now irritate pond owners with their "pound-a-day" fish-eating habits. Mississippi is now the largest catfish producing state, despite the egrets.

Driving a car around the Delta seems one of the best ways to get in touch with the region's rich history. The intensity of the Delta's unforgiving past runs through miles of kudzu vine-covered railroad tracks and sweeps across small country bridges spanning innumerable muddy rivers and streams, small lakes, cane breaks and mossy tree-silhouetted bayous.

Evil still courses through abandoned cotton gins rusting in the centers of nearly ghost towns where their tales are etched into crumbling red brick that once gave structure to active retail stores, cafes, movie houses, Masonic halls, Baptist churches and "colored" and white schools.

Today's Delta countryside remains dotted with white one-room churches that served sharecroppers as schools and houses of worship, some later morphing into freedom schools, NAACP meeting halls or unsafe quarters for "outside agitators." Along most back roads near the small churches or along the edges of cotton fields are occasional run-down sharecropper houses, some abandoned while others still in use. Nearby are small cemeteries, some overgrown by the kudzu.

When seeking formal historical accounts of three definite civil rights time periods, the Delta has its dedicated gatekeepers. Some represent old-line aristocratic families trying to keep their spin on the past. Others may believe that hiding embarrassing Mississippi moments is their inherent responsibility, and good for state economics and better for national politicians.

One Delta blues historian, when preparing a brochure on the history of the Drew Blues Tradition, said he was told to remove a pivotal story involving a gunfight in the town's blues alley that influenced the movement of prominent bluesmen to Chicago. The story was too gruesome.

What is the Delta? Geographically, the entire Mississippi River drainage basin is massive. Stretching north into Canada and south to the Gulf of Mexico, east to New York and west to New Mexico, the total watershed covers 41 percent of the continental United States. But the much smaller Yazoo-Mississippi Delta (or "the Delta") is one of the

region's many smaller basins or flood plains. Once called "the most Southern place on Earth," by historian James C. Cobb, because of its cotton-rich history and defined culture, this flat triangle of fertile land is about two hundred miles long, and at its greatest width stretches between 60 and 70 miles. The surface slopes toward the gulf. At Memphis, the altitude is 217 feet and at Vicksburg it is 94 feet above sea level. The area is about 8,600 square miles.

On a map, the Delta looks like half a football with its western edge following along the mighty Mississippi River's path, but it was a mean-spirited ballgame that was played on this field. With a reputation for harboring a sweltering summer heat, the Delta became an endless supplier of cheap black labor beginning in the 1800s, enabling thousands of white families to become rich and forcing generations of black families to work their entire lives for nothing — to live and die in poverty, illness and despair.

IN THE YEARS from 1820 to 1860, antebellum, or pre-Civil War, slavery was developing throughout the South as thousands of enslaved people, including hundreds still coming directly from Africa, were taken not only into Mississippi but Alabama, Louisiana and Tennessee as well.

In Mississippi, the first counties were organizing in 1820 with Delta counties created later; the last two Delta counties, Issaquena and Sunflower, were not carved out of the others until well after the Civil War, in 1884.

A Vicksburg correspondent to the National Intelligencer of Washington, D.C. in 1855 described an ideal plantation. The size would be about 1,600 acres with 1,000 under cultivation. To work 750 acres of cotton and 250 acres of food crops, such as corn, sweet potatoes and peas, required 75 "effective hands."[4]

The total number of enslaved workers, including those not working in the fields, would be about 135 or 140. Draft animals would include 50 mules and 12 yokes of oxen, with 100 cattle and 300 hogs as livestock. Wagons, gins and other required equipment (like a press, or blacksmith tools) would put the estimated cost of the establishment at $150,000 "if there were no steam engines."

Properly managed, such an enterprise would produce "eight bales to the hand and a bale to the acre." With an estimate of expenses running "$100 to the hand," the reporter calculated a net return of about $12,000.

Post #18 Update: Manhunt Rumors Haunt Mississippi Town With Troubled Past

This morning, with a cup of coffee in hand, I am reading an article by Holbrook Mohr of the Associated Press. This is good — perhaps the media is beginning to wake up to the story unfolding in Sumner. He writes:

“SUMNER, Miss. September 7, 2009 (AP) — In the Mississippi Delta, nothing spreads faster than a rumor that an armed white mob chased black thieves through a cotton field. Throw in an armored personnel carrier and a racially charged past, and it's no surprise federal investigators are checking it out.

“Suspicion is especially deep in Sumner, population about 400, the town where two white men were tried and acquitted in the notorious 1955 slaying of Emmett Till, a black Chicago teenager lynched for whistling at a white woman.”

Well, halleluiah! Just maybe a real reporter has arrived on the scene! At least we are beginning to hear some details.

A real journalist, the late and great David Halberstam, was no stranger to Tallahatchie County. Halberstam not only covered the Bryant and Milam trial, but he stayed on for the trial of a white man who shot a black service-station attendant, Clinton Melton, less than a month after the two men who killed Till were set free.

The father of four children was shot in cold blood by a friend of Milam’s, in a Glendora gas station located only four miles from where Emmett Till’s body was dumped into the Tallahatchie River.

Clinton Melton’s young wife, Beulah [Melton] was killed under suspicious circumstances shortly before the murder trial opened. She had been trying to gather information to help convict the man who killed her husband when her car “accidentally” veered into a bayou and she was drowned.

The sheriff said Beulah Melton was a bad driver, her daughter, Delores Gresham said. Gresham survived the crash and remembers water coming into the car. She describes her mother as an active, curious person who would have naturally tried to uncover information about her husband’s death and believes this is what got her mother killed. But the death of Beulah Melton has never made it to an FBI cold case list.

The trial of the man accused of killing Clinton Melton ended in an acquittal. Halberstam, knowing what was about to take place in the courtroom, offered his assessment even before the trial began:

“A friend of mine divides the white population of Mississippi into two categories. The first and largest contains the good people of Mississippi, as they are affectionately called by editorial writers, politicians, and themselves. The other group is a smaller but in many ways more conspicuous faction called the peckerwoods.

“The good people will generally agree that the peckerwoods are troublemakers, and indeed several good people have told me they joined the Citizens Councils because otherwise the peckerwoods would take over the situation entirely. It is the good people who will tell you that their town has enjoyed racial harmony for many years, while it is the peckerwoods who may confide that they know how to keep the niggers in their place;

it is the good people who say and mean, ‘We love our nigras,’ and it is the peckerwoods who say and mean, ‘If any big buck gets in my way it’ll be too damn bad.’

“But while the good people would not act with the rashness of and are not governed by the hatred of the peckerwood, they are reluctant to apply society’s normal remedies to the peckerwood. Thus it is the peckerwoods who kill Negroes and the good people who acquit the peckerwoods...”[103]

I would imagine if he was alive today, Halberstam would already be camping out in Sumner with his notebook and cell phone running hot.

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Post #28 Final Post: The Beginning or the End?

"There are two lasting bequests we can give our children. One is roots. The other is wings."

William Hodding Carter, Jr., Mississippi journalist and winner of a Pulitzer Prize for civil rights reporting

"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 Till Mobley, mother of Emmett Till

In midsummer 2009, a 40-second video clip circulated on the Internet of an Iranian girl, a philosophy student named Neda Soltani who was allegedly shot dead by a Basij soldier.

On her way to a music lesson when struck down, Soltani's violent death came as Iran faced demonstrations in the magnitude not seen since the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

Throughout the world, people watched the scene of this 16-year-old girl, with a single bullet wound in her chest, lying on her back as her family tragically unsuccessfully tried to save her. Blood was leaving her chest, and later flowing from her mouth and nose as her face was eventually left covered in red. In a few moments, Neda was pronounced dead.

Another story of a teenage girl, very much like this tragedy, happened across the planet back in 1971 at the end of the school term when Jo Etha Collier was shot to death in the streets of Drew, Mississippi as her friends looked on.

Collier, 18, was celebrating her high school graduation. Drinking soda pop with friends out in front of a small grocery store, her life ended. Like Neda, she had only been an observer of recent protests and clashes going on all around her as the modern civil rights movement progressed — or tried to.

Neda is the Farsi word for voice. Jo in Hebrew translates to He will enlarge and Etha, a variation of the Old English name Ethel, means noble.

In the end, these two martyrs were cut down before they had an opportunity to give voice to their dreams, to enlarge the opportunities open to them and confer nobility to their culture.

Yet in these stories of young and old murder victims, if one listens quietly, it is possible to hear their voices and the songs of others like them from the rivers, bayous and terrain of the Delta as they whisper their freedom songs.

Yes, the river in Minter City sings and so do the bayous and bogues throughout all of Mississippi. To hear the sorrow as it flows through time, just listen.

Simply listen.

BY THE END of the 1960s and into the early 1970s, well over a dozen years after Brown I and Brown II and the murders of Rev. George Lee, Lamar Smith and then Emmett Till and others, violence was once again accelerating in Mississippi. More black people were being killed or turning up "missing" than there had been in recent years.

Attempts increased to destroy individuals and organizations bent on stopping this violence. The Black Panther Party and lesser-known volunteer groups, sometimes church run, worked to help Mississippi's blacks either change their conditions or flee the state.

Both the Panthers and the Box Project, the later aiding sharecroppers to physically escape plantations, were perceived much like Chicago's ACORN in 2009 — their efforts at community organization and related activities often misunderstood or misrepresented.

Fear of events outside of the South such as the Watt's burning in 1965 translated into attempts to halt expansion plans by the Panthers, who in 1969 were quietly trying to organize college students at Delta State University in Cleveland, 17 miles southwest of Drew.

After moving out of the South following Freedom Summer of 1964, some movement veterans were now returning home from the major cities like Detroit, Los Angeles and other boiling pots. Isaac Henderson Shorter of Cleveland returned home from Detroit where he had led demonstrations, hoping as a Delta State student to galvanize students through the Black Panther organization. The Sovereignty Commission was spying on Shorter and others who had, by an agent's report, "returned from Berkeley with a stack of Black Panther newspapers." For an agency two years away from winding down, the returning community organizers breathed new life into the Sovereignty Commission's investigations. State archives show 25 files on Shorter, alone.

In Greenville, as the city's well-known journalist Hodding Carter, Jr. was coming to the end of his career, another murder of a black child took place; a child even younger than Neda Soltani, Jo Etha Collier or Emmett Till — a child who was simply surrounded by violence and could do nothing about it.

Flora Jean Smith

Thirteen year-old Flora Jean Smith was sexually assaulted and murdered on July 19, 1969. Smith was reported missing after she failed to return from a babysitting job and soon after her body found in a nearby lake.

A Sovereignty Commission report dated August 1 stated that "Sidney E. Taylor W/M, 36 years of age, of Greenville, a house painter" was charged with her kidnapping and murder. Ninety persons marched in memory of the young girl and Taylor would serve a short prison sentence before disappearing from Greenville altogether.

Still, few people outside of Mississippi's more rural battle zones knew what was happening in the state's smaller towns when problems occurred, especially in places like Drew, Ruleville, Greenville and Charleston, since news reports were few and sporadic.

Some news of violence and murders made it into the mainstream media while other skirmishes — from mild to death-producing, such as the murder of Flora Smith — simply came and went with little recognition.

Phillip Gibbs, James Earl Green

Even violence in the state capitol, at Jackson State University, sailed through history with little comment. During a two-day student protest starting on May 14, 1970, 20-year-old Phillip Gibbs, a junior, and James Earl Green, a Jackson bystander, were slain and several others wounded when police fired a barrage of gunfire on a dormitory and a dining hall. Upon hearing false rumors that slain leader Medgar Evers' brother, Charles Evers, had been killed along with his wife, students had gathered on Lynch Street and began rioting.

These Jackson killings are often forgotten in the shadow of Kent State, which took place ten days earlier. Local media coverage was limited and racist, as usual. The university newspaper would not report the incident until a special edition was issued one year later. The Grand Jury refused to indict any of the officers involved in the shootings and in 1974, a US Court of Appeals ruled that the officers could not be held liable for the two deaths despite concluding they had overreacted. In 1982, all but two U.S. Supreme Court Justices refused to hear the case.

Young Students Rebel

In some rural communities, high school students were becoming more involved in civil rights clashes, as the movement began to regroup in Mississippi.

On October 20, 1970, over 125 black high school students were arrested in Charleston and taken to the prison at Parchman Penitentiary, some 33 miles southwest of their school. Two were jailed in Sumner.

The students had been marching and picketing "under the direction of the county's NAACP director, Lucy Boyd...also a congressional candidate," Sovereignty Commission director W. B. Burke learned from his investigator, James Mohead.

On Friday, high school students began walking around the school singing freedom songs and chanting. Warned of possible arrest, they kept up the same activities, starting out fresh that Monday morning when they were once again warned they could be arrested. Mohead and Boyce differ on what happened next. "Those under 18 years of age were returned to Charleston after records were made of names, ages, etc. and they were never [taken] beyond the records office." The students were returned to churches in Charleston where they were released to their parents, Mohead told his boss.

Years later, when Boyd finally saw Mohead's report in old Sovereignty Commission files first released in 1997, she said the investigator lied. "The children — all of them — spent the night at Parchman Penitentiary in cells. The Sovereignty Commission was always twisting their facts around and this is just one example."[127]

Mohead claimed he "took the offense," and contacted Clarksdale civil rights leader Aaron Henry about the incident "after hearing a rumor that Henry had been in Charleston."

Boyd said she had been talking with Henry by telephone throughout the day. The pharmacist who resided and worked in Clarksdale, about 40 miles northwest of Charleston, stayed close to his business phone as Boyd's calls came in, she said. Mohead's report insisted that Henry was the instigator of Charleston's student action, having picked up the idea from "the Coffeeville action."

Coffeeville's African American students were being bussed to their school — the town is about 50 miles to the East of Charleston, outside of the Delta — for part of a day, and then to another school, under court order, and they were trying to get back into court "in an effort to bring a change in the procedure," according to Mohead.

Charleston school children showed great bravery after being locked up all night in Mississippi's most notorious prison, Boyd said. But they had a strategy — and it worked. Their loud screaming resulted in prison officials getting sick and tired of the noise and sending them home, confirmed Robert Keglar, a former Charleston schoolteacher.

Birdia Keglar, Adlena Hamlett and James "Sunny Boy" Keglar: So, Who Makes the Cold Case "Rules?"

Civil rights cold cases are heating up since the FBI announced in November of 2009 that agents were seeking to interview next of kin of people who might have been victims of hate-crime based attacks. But before the FBI will take action on a cold case, a victim's name has to get on the cold case list, and this concerns Nina Zachary-Black, the granddaughter of Adlena Hamlett, a voting rights activist who was killed in the late afternoon hours of Jan. 12, 1966, at the age of 78. Hamlett was a school teacher.[128]

So far, no one from the FBI has knocked on Zachary-Black's door to ask about her grandmother. Responding to the FBI's nation-wide request for next of kin to call the agency with information, Zachary-Black contacted the FBI in December of 2009, but the answer from an agent of the Minneapolis FBI office was stunning:

"Minneapolis has decided not to pass on this information to the FBI in Mississippi. We would need a police report in order to prove that it was civil rights connected," the agent reportedly said.

Zachery-Black wanted to know who made this decision not to investigate or pass on the information to Mississippi and asked for their name, to no avail. "The agent told me that the FBI does not have jurisdiction over murder cases unless they happened on federal land," Zachery-Black said. "And they would not give me the names of the agents who made this decision. They would not let me talk to anyone else."

"I said this is a cold case — what could be colder than this?"

The FBI agent was "particularly irritating" to Hamlett's granddaughter when she questioned why her family "waited so long" to report the death. "I told her we wrote to the Justice Department early on and never got a reply."

Zachary-Black, a Minneapolis school teacher, also wants to know why a police report from Mississippi would be required. “That doesn’t make sense,” she said. “Some of the police officers back then were known to be Klansmen back they. My relatives would have been killed if they had tried to call the police and ask for help.”[129]

So much for the cold cases.

Murder came in waves and hit all ages as the intensity of civil rights activities grew in the mid and late 1960s. Not only were children being killed and bullied, but elder activists like Keglar and Hamlett were harassed, too.

Both women were killed in the early evening hours of Jan. 12, 1966, outside of Greenwood in a suspicious car wreck. Birdia Beatrice Clark Keglar, 58, a voting rights activist, was involved with forming a local NAACP chapter in Tallahatchie County. Keglar was the first black person to vote in Tallahatchie County since the end of Reconstruction.

Their car was reportedly forced off the road in Sidon, a small town near Greenwood in Leflore County, as they returned from a civil rights meeting in Jackson, said Robert Keglar, who was first told about his mother’s death by a close friend who claimed to have witnessed the accident. This was not the first time they had been chased, one of the driver’s relatives said. A friend of Robert Keglar confirms earlier car chases, too.

Keglar said the local district attorney visited his Charleston home that night to tell him of the accident. The prosecutor said a drunk driver had hit their car, forcing it from the road and killing both women. The prosecutor also warned Keglar to stay home and not go to the accident scene. But, despite this warning, Keglar immediately went to the site, a small town known quite well for Klan activities.

Keglar said he was interviewed several times in 2009 by the FBI. He said agents told him the case was closed and that his mother died from injuries received in an auto accident. They had no answers to offer regarding the death of his brother, James “Sonny Boy” Keglar, who died three months later.

Interviewed by me on January 4, 2010, Robert Keglar said he doesn’t believe the FBI has any further interest in his mother’s death. “I am not satisfied with what the FBI told me about my mother’s death. I believe that she and my brother were victims of a crime. None of our relatives believe what the FBI told us,” Keglar stated.

Three months after his mother died in the wreck, Birdia Keglar’s youngest son, James or “Sonny Boy” died in a mysterious fire when his home burned down. Reportedly, he was three months into a personal investigation of his mother’s death and, according to Robert Keglar, FBI representatives still claim there are no files on James Keglar.

Relatives of both Keglar and Hamlett believe there was definite evidence of foul play. Both women had been subjected to bullying and harassment because of their civil rights activities. Hamlett was hanged in effigy months earlier, records show

Zachary-Black believes the murder of her grandmother, Adlena Hamlett, could have been prompted by her own father's well-known hatred of the late U.S. Senator James O. Eastland and her father's political activism, as well.

"When he [James Black, a school principal] heard about Adlena's murder, my father wept and said that Eastland had finally gotten to him by murdering Adlena. My father often collided with the senator, who was a noted racist."

"My father tried really hard to get someone to go to the site. By the time my grandfather, Berry Hamlett, got to the scene, everything was cleaned up. It had been washed away. They used hoses and he said there was nothing left to see."

Despite possible motives and details of the actual incident, Hamlett's granddaughter knows what she saw at the funeral home.

Zachary-Black and her brother, James Black, Jr., examined her grandmother Adlena's body at the funeral home and it was apparent that body parts had been severed, indicating possible Ku Klux Klan involvement, she said during interviews in 2005 and again in 2009. Coincidentally, at the time of the accident, according to later FBI reports, some highway patrolmen in that particular region were also known Klan members.

Zachary-Black said that funeral home personnel told her and her brother it would be better for the caskets to stay closed: "My brother said 'no, it would be open,' and so they said they would let my brother see the casket. I came up behind when he was examining the body and I saw that her head was too small for her body. I saw my brother lift her head and it seemed to be that her head was detached from her body. "He said to me, 'We're not going to say anything about this.' "

"I just listened to him. There wasn't anything we could do. My mother, Jimmie Louise, never looked at the body. But her daughter, my aunt who lived in Kansas City, Julia, looked at the body when the funeral home director wheeled it by her and she started screaming and saying, 'That's not my mother.' She knew that something was very wrong with her body."

Lila Hamlett, Adlena's youngest daughter, also saw her mother's body at the funeral home, Zachary-Black said. "She told me there were gloves lying across Adlena's body but there were no hands in the gloves."

Zachary-Black said she wants the FBI to take a better look at the death of her grandmother and Keglar. "I have wanted this to be investigated since she died. I've been recently thinking about it and have hoped something will happen while I'm still living." Zackary-Black turned 75 on Nov. 15, 2009.

But will the FBI listen? Or has this cold case — that was never put on the list in the first place — already been closed, due to a conflicting report by a white passenger in the car?

Richard “Dick” Simpson, a survivor of the crash, gives a different view of what happened, and asserts both women were killed on impact, even though he admits he was sleeping in the back seat at the time of impact. Simpson, after being tracked down for an interview by the FBI in the fall of 2009, said he believed the crash was an accident.[130]

As a 27-year-old civil rights SNCC volunteer from Massachusetts, stationed in Belzoni, he was traveling with the two women and two other black men home from a Jackson meeting.

Simpson, the only white person in the car, said he was fighting to survive as he crawled from the back seat of the car through the back window, that he was sleeping when the crash occurred and did not see what happened. But when he woke up, he said, “They looked dead to me.” From that point forward, Simpson was not able to recall further events until he found himself in the hospital.

Simpson, who I also interviewed in the fall of 2009, said he is sympathetic to their deaths but said his memories of the crash are “still vivid,” even though the accident took place 43 years ago. I asked him if he was aware that trauma victims sometimes report false memories (often using the term “vivid”) and he said ‘no.’

Apparently the FBI has chosen not to investigate the accident any further, using Simpson’s report, without ever interviewing Zachary-Black or any of her surviving relatives. Even though Simpson admits to being asleep in the back seat when the crash occurred, the FBI counts him as an eye witness to the accident.

Zachary-Black says she is “more than disappointed if this is the case.” “I have a friend whose husband is a psychologist. He told me that it is not unusual for people suffering this some type of trauma to believe they can remember an incident vividly. Important details may be wrong or missing and some things that seem vivid may not, in fact, have happened at all.

“I know what I saw at the funeral home and want my grandmother’s body exhumed, too, just like Emmett Till’s. I want to talk to the FBI. I don’t think this case should end with Simpson’s questionable memories.”

Grafton Gray, Birdia Keglar’s cousin who was the driver, was also injured seriously and taken to the Mound Bayou hospital, said Gwen Dailey, Grafton Gray’s great-niece. She states she is also displeased with the FBI’s lack of interest.

Gray suffered emotionally afterwards and "was never the same," she said. Dailey could tell that her father was suspicious of what happened to his brother and to the others who

were injured or killed: "My great-uncle was already a quiet man. He received under-handed threats while in the hospital to keep quiet about what happened, my father learned.

"Employees and visitors would come into his room and tell him to ‘be careful,’ but not in a caring way. When he came home, the threats continued. "He would go out into the fields by his house and stand, gazing away. He rarely talked. Even my own father became far more cautious with his own children, and he watched Uncle Grafton like a hawk. Mr. Brewer, another passenger, was injured too, and he was never the same. His reaction was the same as my great-uncle."

Margaret Block, an old friend of Birdia Keglar’s, said she was told years later by journalist Plater Robinson of New Orleans, who often wrote for the *Times Picyune*, that “the undertaker who picked up the bodies said it was not an accident but a murder. The undertaker was from Greenwood and Plater recorded the interview.” Robinson, apparently traveling in 2010, could not be contacted for details in time to meet this book’s publication date.

BOTH KEGLAR AND Hamlett were long-time civil rights activists and met with U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy sometime during 1965, say family and friends. Both women testified in hearings before the U.S. Commission On Civil Rights taking place in Jackson, Miss. in February of that year, telling of the years of harassment they'd been through for their involvement in voting rights. At one meeting, the senator warned his audience that both women had better return home safely, Robert Keglar said. Family and friends are unsure of the place and date of that meeting, but remember hearing from the two women about RFK’s remarks.

John D. Sullivan

Coincidentally, another Mississippian dying that same month in 1966 was a white detective from Vicksburg, John Daniel Sullivan, a former FBI agent and frequent Sovereignty Commission consultant on segregation enforcement cases. The facts surrounding Sullivan’s death are also hazy. Sullivan reportedly died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound following a hunting accident — shooting himself in the groin and then bleeding to death, his relatives state.

Sullivan had been working under contract for Guy Banister of New Orleans, a former FBI agent who in 1963 began working for Mafia criminal defense lawyer G. Wray Gill, also a Mississippian, and Gill's client, Carlos Marcello, the New Orleans-based Godfather of the American Mafia Family whose operations were centered in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas. Sullivan knew Banister from the Chicago FBI office where they once worked together.

Banister's known involvement with Marcello centered on attempts to block Marcello's deportation, ordered by Robert F. Kennedy. Did Sullivan know too much? One family member says that two weeks before Sullivan died, he told one of his sons that he had run

into information “so far over his head that he did not know where to go.” In 1979, the House assassinations committee concluded that at least two shooters were involved in the John F. Kennedy assassination, and that a list of most likely conspirators included Marcello. Banister has also been implicated in the JFK assassination.

Maybe Sullivan ran into something bigger than the Delta’s kudzu could hide.

Jo Etha Collier

Jo Etha Collier, the Drew High School senior murdered at graduation, was officially killed by Wesley Parks, 25, of Drew. It was a murder that "seemed to have no motive," said a sheriff's deputy.

Parks, his brother and their nephew, Allen Wilkerson, 19, of Memphis were in the truck and all three were arrested in nearby Cleveland within three hours of the shooting. A 22-caliber pistol "with one bullet missing" was found in the car along with a 12-gauge Army issue riot gun and a 22-caliber automatic rifle, according to Sovereignty Commission reports. No police department or state agency has been able to produce copies of the autopsy report.

Others in Drew's black community disagreed with the sheriff's assessment at the time, including civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer of nearby Ruleville, who at the time said she was "convinced that Collier's death was connected with the current voter registration campaign."

Collier was not active with the campaign going on at the time, but visiting reporters at Collier's funeral were reminded that black political activity in the Delta — where blacks outnumber whites — had "long met with a proportionate increase in white harassment."

FBI agents went to Drew and studied the crime, according to Sovereignty Commission reports. But all FBI records on the death of Collier, requested by this author in April 2004, were reported by the FBI as "destroyed on March 16, 2004." No reason was given.

Police Chief J. D. Fleming of Drew told news reporters the three men involved "were very much under the influence of alcohol." Fleming said he took Collier's two companions to Cleveland to identify the suspect. The three men offered no resistance when arrested in Cleveland, Fleming said.

About 45 minutes before the shooting, the men were seen sitting in their truck at a service station located less than a block away from the grocery store. When a black male asked for a light, "one of the occupants of the vehicle reportedly pointed a revolver at the negro male and told him, 'I'll put all your G.D. lights out,' " the investigator's report stated.

Collier was reportedly killed by a single bullet, which hit her in the neck as she stood in front of a grocery store "in the negro section of town." At her funeral, Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, chair of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, eulogized Collier before an audience of 2,000.

"The foes of evil have robbed us of one of our most dear and talented sisters…How long will black people be mistreated in Mississippi? How long will black people be shot down in the Delta?" the SCLC leader asked those gathered in the auditorium of Drew High School. Abernathy called for massive change that would come with black voter

registrations to put blacks in office "…so that we can see that her living and dying was not in vain."

Drew's Mayor W. O. Williford, seated on the main stage during the rites, told a reporter he was surprised at the large turnout of blacks, and spoke of recent gains by Delta blacks: "If that many Negroes had gathered in one place when I first took office there surely would have been bloodshed."

The atmosphere was peaceful enough that Williford quickly sent away the highway patrolmen who were there in case of an anticipated flare up. Days earlier, the mayor imposed an 8 p.m. until daylight curfew and called in the officers to help enforce it. After the ceremony, Collier, regarded highly by teachers and friends, was buried in the all-black section of Drew's community cemetery.

Another version of the Jo Etha Collier story that still lingers in this small town with a unique history of African American murders, suggests that some students reported a teacher was riding in the car. This person was reportedly harassed so much by students in the years following Collier's murder that he finally left to teach in a private, segregated academy.

Cleve McDowell, practicing law in Jackson, returned to Drew to help keep his hometown calm. Concerned about the community and the safety of its children, he decided to make this move permanent. Meeting with the mayor before Collier's very public funeral, McDowell was required to pledge that no outsiders — "especially Fannie Lou Hamer" — would come into Drew and cause problems during several planned marches. Hamer was well known for her state and national activism and never met a politician that scared her away from stating her demands, President Lyndon B. Johnson and Hubert Humphrey, included.

Collier's family was extremely poor and McDowell paid all funeral costs expenses. Working hard to maintain calm, he requested and was granted a permit for mourners to hold peaceful daily marches in the downtown section of Drew and at the same time, the attorney was careful to praise the "swift police work" in apprehending the three men. "Now there must be vigorous prosecution. Responsible people are angry at this senseless murder," he told a visiting newspaper reporter.

Once back in Drew for good, McDowell ran for city council, becoming Drew's first black assistant mayor. A Sovereignty report filed September 16, 1971, noted, "Chief of Police Fleming…advised that Cleve McDowell, N/M, formerly of Drew, now of Jackson, is spending a lot of time in the Drew, Ruleville area. These visits are believed to be political, in nature."

McDowell eased back into his birthplace and by the following year was named to the state Penitentiary Board in July by Governor Bill Waller and was reappointed for a five-year-term in 1972. He was the first black to hold this position, until then reserved for whites. At the end of his term, McDowell told Ron Harris of the Associated Press he

hoped his appointment helped pave the way for other African Americans, and that he had "pushed hard" to get the appointment because he felt blacks needed to become involved at the decision making level.

"Three Killings in a Week"

Prompted by the murders of Collier and others, Aaron Henry telegraphed President Richard Nixon to protest the "wave of senseless killing in Mississippi of black citizens by white citizens." Henry said it was the "third such killing in less than a week."

"There was no provocation and no words were passed. It's doubtful that they knew Miss Collier," Henry told a UPI reporter. "They apparently were out to kill a black, any black."

All three men were initially charged with murder but only Wesley Parks was tried. Charges were dropped against the other two men. Parks was sent to prison for five years, but served less than three years of his sentence and then, like Flora Jean Smith's killer, he dropped out of sight.

This blatant inaction prompted Henry to question George Everett, district attorney for the three-county region. There were potential dangers from Everett's decision to drop charges, Henry warned in a letter to the prosecutor:[131]

"Your statement today…really pulls the rug from under those of us in the NAACP who worked so hard to prevent violent retaliation against whites by determined members of the black community. Particularly you have seriously undercut the good will efforts of Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer and attorney Cleve McDowell.
"There are not as many of us in the Black Community as there once were who took a forthright position condemning violence, for whatever the cause. Now there are many Blacks anxious to engage in the "eye for an eye," "tooth for a tooth," type of violence. Putting it another way, "white man for black man" retaliation. When announcements come out such as you issued today, they only give reason for those prone toward violence to exercise it.

"Those who once had the confidence of the community, on the sides of non-violence, are losing the confidence of the Black citizens of our communities, especially when we were the ones to caution and advise the masses to have confidence in the law or the legal system.

"You see, if a jury acquits a man who is tried, and in this case a white man for the murder of a Black citizen, then at least there has been some attempt to secure justice. But when the District Attorney pronounces that those charged will not be brought to trial, then we are almost back to where we were in the "Dred Scott" U.S. Supreme Court decision of a hundred years ago, that established that a Black had no rights that whites were bound to respect.

"Of course this also meant the privilege of a white to take the life of a black with no fear of ever coming to trial, just as your announcement today. Once the pent up violence that exists in many members of the Black Community begins to explode, then the cry of the white community is going to be a call for "peace." …You can help us in our position, or render us useless, and those prone toward violence will be in the position of advising our people what steps to take next…. Think it over!"

Henry's quote was taken from a letter signed by Henry and received into state archives in 2003 for "processing." As of August 2009, this letter and all other Tougaloo College records of Aaron Henry, including the telegraph to President Nixon that were presented to the William F. Winters Archives, were "not available" for viewing. The letter was found buried in papers held by the college archives before the school donated Henry's paper to the state institution. It will be interesting to see if the letter ever makes it to the "processed" bin.

One older Drew resident, of course asking to remain anonymous, said that random shootings frequently took place in the community for years, and sometimes still do."This was happening everywhere in the Delta, and no one would do anything about it. Whites rode around on our side of town and shot at black people. There was no reason for it, except they were usually drinking." While traveling around the Delta, I heard the same stories of random shootings from elderly blacks in Belzoni, Goat Hill and Charleston.

Eddie McClinton and Edgar Higginbottom

In neighboring Tallahatchie County, a murder took place two days before Collier was killed, according to Henry's records. On May 23, 1971, military veteran Eddie McClinton was allegedly killed by a white "night marshal" in Sumner in a fight at a pop machine. Sovereignty Commission investigator Mohead learned from county deputy sheriff Downs, doubling as the town marshal, that McClinton was shot three times and killed by a white man outside of Sumner.

Mohead reported that McClinton was observed by Sumner Night Marshal Tom Trannam "kicking and beating on a change machine" at a self-service gas station. When Trannam intervened, McClinton threatened to kill him, Downs told Mohead.

"McClinton started for Trannam, in a threatening manner, Trannam fired one shot to the right of McClinton attempting to stop him. McClinton continued to advance and told Trannam, 'If you don't kill me, you white S.O.B., I'm going to kill you.' At this time, Trannam shot McClinton once in the arm and once in the chest with a 45 cal. pistol," Mohead's report stated. No hearing or coroner's inquest was held, and Downs said he would get back to Mohead after he conferred with Trannam "and the two negro witnesses."

During the week of November 1, 1971 Sovereignty Commission investigator Fulton Tutor reported from Pontotoc, west of Tupelo, where the grand jury reported out "without

returning an indictment against Jake Denton, W /M, who shot ‘the Negro’ a few months ago in Ecru. There is a possibility of some reaction from the black community over this.”

Tutor did not name the victim Edger Higginbottom in his report. Also during the week, Tutor “did some checking on white voters to see if all were out to vote.” In Holly Springs, Tutor learned from Mayor Coopwood that “for the first time the whites all worked together in this election and this really paid off, as the blacks only won the Justice of the Peace post.”

Sid Harrison

As state NAACP president, Henry often received letters like one dated December 21, 1972 from a resident of Jonesboro, Arkansas regarding her missing brother, Sid Harrison of Holcomb in Carroll County.

In late October 1972, Harrison disappeared from his family without a trace of him or his automobile. “Since several of Mr. Harrison’s relatives believe that he has been murdered in the manner of the three civil rights workers of 1964 near Philadelphia… along with his relatives appreciate…your immediate cooperation.”

Like so many other Mississippi endless stories, this man’s disappearance appears to have faded into history. No other related letters or reports about Harrison could be found in Henry’s archival papers at Tougaloo.

In April of 1972, Mississippi lost its most famous journalists to natural death after a series of health problems, Hodding Carter Jr., the courageous editor of the Greenville *Delta Democrat-Times*, Mississippi's most liberal newspaper during the Civil Rights era, died at 65 of a heart attack during a workout at an athletic club in Greenville.
“He knew his enemies’ virtues and would recite them, and his favorite retort to the righteously angry was, ‘Yes, but …’

He told great stories, full of villains and heroes and morals, stories for passing on. We will remember,” wrote his son, Philip Carter, in an editorial for his father’s newspaper. Hodding Carter II was serving as the newspaper’s publisher but the family quickly sold the publication.

Daisy Savage and Grandson

In May of 1973, Mrs. Daisy Savage and her 11-year-old grandson of Hollandale were murdered, probably by Klansmen, believes Charles Sudduth, a Deltan who researches and writes about the Mississippi Klan. Sudduth says that Savage had provided room for the two white civil rights workers assigned to the small town near Belzoni in 1964.

“What I heard was that a city official and a party of 4 to 20 Klansmen stoned them to death. I also heard that at least one black person witnessed her killing and that person is

said to still be alive. That was also confirmed to me by a black civil rights attorney who was originally from Hollandale, Jesse Pennington."

The killing may have taken place in south Washington County, near or around the Yazoo Wildlife Refuge. "If it in fact this is true, then Federal authorities have jurisdiction in the matter…On the other hand, I also heard the murders took place right at the county line between Issaquena and Washington County, so this might indicate a still unresolved question of jurisdiction."[132]

Lillie Mae Bumpers

I found this undated, anonymous message appearing on a Clarksdale Internet discussion group, ClarksdaleWebinfo.com:

"I lived in Clarksdale from 1971 to 1989 and am searching to find archived obituaries or newspaper articles on deceased family members. My mother, Dorothy Sykes was murdered on May 5, 1977 and her body was found in a ditch just outside of the Clarksdale area. She had seven bullet wounds to the head. I do recall that there was a typo in the spelling of my mother's last name in the obituary. Her address was 324 Bolivar Street.

"Also, my aunt, Lillie Mae Bumpers, was killed and her body was found in Moon Lake around June to September 1982. Rescue workers were searching for the body of a couple that were suspected to have drowned in a fishing boat and they discovered her body during the search. The funeral home that handled my mother's body was Delta Burial Funeral Home and I think that Smith Funeral Home handled my aunt's body. "I ...would be more than happy to come and pick up any material that you may be able to provide for me. If there is a cost for obtaining this information, please let me know as well. Thank you for your time."

Civil rights leader Aaron Henry never gave up trying to stop the bloodshed. Records show he met with Governor Cliff Finch and his Director of Minority Affairs, R. L. Bolden on September 16, 1976, to "acquaint and remind them of the upsurge in racism that is pervading Mississippi, with its most pronounced manifestation being in the area of police brutality."

James Calhoun

The two most recent worst acts of this kind, according to Aaron Henry were the "apparent lynching" by Klansmen of sixteen-year-old James Calhoun in the Bolivar-Sunflower area[133] and the killing of a young black by a highway patrolman in Sturgis, Mississippi.

The Sovereignty Commission was not above harassing Henry and there would be payback for these and other complaints made to officials outside of the state. According to papers turned over to the Winters Archives by Tougaloo College [but not available for

re-viewing as of Aug. 2009], the day after meeting with the two Mississippi officials, Henry spent the following day in Oxford and then attended a meeting on the Gulf Coast with Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter.

Saturday was filled with Democratic Party Administrative Committee meetings in Jackson and with leaders of the Mississippi Carter-Mondale campaign, Head Start meetings, and dinner with friends, running until 10 p.m. that evening. Henry returned to his hotel room but was awakened shortly after midnight with a call "informing me that a black youth was being beaten by the police in the park across from Central High School" a few blocks from the hotel. Deciding to observe the action, he dressed and walked around to the park where he saw two young men sitting on a park bench at the park's entry. The NAACP director asked if they had seen a black youth being beaten by the police and both replied they had not. Henry took their names — David Bronstein and Isom Herron — and then saw a man approaching him with handcuffs in one hand and a portable radio in the other.

Henry asked the officer about the beating of a young black man and was told that he was "sticking my nose into too much in police business." Upon the officer's suggestion, they both headed back to the hotel "to talk" but the officer became "suddenly angry" and asserted Henry was interfering with the legal activity of a police officer.

Henry was placed under arrest, while reminding the officer that he had "… been in jails before, larger than the ones in Jackson." Henry was taken to the station and charged with disorderly conduct with a bond set at $500. A court appearance was set for the following Monday. This was a resurgence of racism, Henry later wrote:

"We are in the process now of formulating plans to challenge this resurgence of racism. Some personalities in Mississippi still feel that the repressive tactics of the 1960s will still work. Although the Sovereignty Commission no longer legally exists, its tactics are forever before us. The judgments against the NAACP by two recent Mississippi judges, the attacks upon black and white personalities in this rebirth of vicious Dirty Tricks will live for a while, but in a short time they too will pass away. Although there are some Mississippians unhappy about the progress of the Black and White Community away from racism, the reality of the uniting of the Democratic Party with blacks and whites equally involved, is more progress than some, perhaps many, would like to see. Nevertheless, it is for real."

Fannie Lou Hamer

On March 14, 1977, Fannie Lou Hamer died penniless in Mound Bayou. Friends made the arrangements for her funeral and raised the funds to pay for it. Her last years were spent at home in Ruleville, where she raised thousands of dollars to feed displaced farm laborers through her Freedom Farm Cooperative and pig bank.

Mrs. Hamer also raised funds for housing and for the day care center that was named for her. She continued as an activist, speaking against the Vietnam War and abuses in the state's poverty and Medicaid programs.

In her final years, Hamer was in pain as she suffered from breast cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. A friend and fellow civil rights activist said she had never totally recovered from the beating she received by a policeman in Winona. "Everyone said she died of diabetes and cancer, but she died from those beatings," Margaret Block said.

At the service, Julian Bond, Stokely Carmichael, Aaron Henry, and Hodding Carter II spoke of her contributions and Andrew Young, the principal speaker, praised Mrs. Hamer as "a woman who literally helped turn this nation around."

Sam Block

Margaret Block's brother, Samuel Block, a pioneer civil rights leader in the modern civil rights movement and early SNCC field secretary who fought for voting rights in the Delta and elsewhere, did not escape the chaos once he left Mississippi.

After moving to California, where he remained a political activist, Block ended up serving time in federal prison at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama, his sister said. "Sam had been set up for an embezzlement charge and for running guns to the Contras. My brother was very bright, but not stupid. And he would never have committed such crimes."

Block was in prison for five years until "he finally got out on parole and appeals." His alleged crime took place in California, but the trial ended up in federal court in Oxford, Mississippi, Margaret Block said. "I've never figured out why this happened and I'll never forget at sentencing when the judge told him, 'We finally got your smart ass now. I've waited a long time.' "

The Mississippi Delta civil rights pioneer died on April 13, 2000, in his Los Angeles apartment at the age of 60. "There was never an inquest; no coroner pronounced him dead, and I still have questions," Margaret Block said. "He had not been ill. I do know that someone removed the hard drive to his computer and took his papers. That apparently happened during his funeral."

Block's sister said that she learned from her brother's daughter that the coroner was never called to pronounce her brother dead and that his death certificate was not signed until two weeks later, after an autopsy was performed. "The police and medics called the funeral home and took him there directly. This held up the funeral service for two weeks because the coroner finally was able to do an autopsy. The results were termed inconclusive because his body had been embalmed."

Sam Block was scheduled to keynote a civil rights conference celebrating the 40th anniversary of SNCC at Shaw University in North Carolina. "He did not show up and

people began to worry. I don't know exactly what happened next but that his daughter was called. She went to his apartment and found him dead."

Sam Block was an early target, as one of the first early voting rights advocates from Mississippi allowed to move into a SNCC leadership role while the organization picked up speed. In the 1960s, Block served as point man for voter registration effort in Greenwood a key battleground, and headquarters of the white Citizens Councils. In his first six months working Greenwood, the violent response of Council members and others made the job nearly impossible. *Look* magazine reported in 1963 that Block had signed up only five black voters.

James Travis of Greenwood, who was shot in the head and neck as he drove a car with several SNCC colleagues in 1963 — and survived — once called his old friend Block "very smart" and "fearless." Travis died of pancreatic cancer in 2009.

Who Killed Emmett Till?

The Mississippi Delta keeps its own history files. And in the file drawers are the stories of people like Fannie Lou Hamer, Aaron Henry, Amzie Moore, Cleve McDowell, Sam Block and so many others. Learning more about these people means looking through boxes of old newspapers held by libraries, reading some of the few books that have been written about them, and talking to people still living who were around during the 1950s and 1960s. These people and their stories are the stuff of Mississippi's state history and are of critical importance to understanding the history of this country.

All stories are important, but one stands out: In the early morning hours August 28, 1955 two or possibly three white men from the Mississippi Delta kidnapped and killed a 14-year-old black kid who was visiting his mother's relatives in Money.

Emmett Till, born in Chicago's Cook County Hospital in 1941 to Louis and Mamie Till, he should never have been allowed to visit relative in Mississippi. The state was a powder keg after the Supreme Court's Brown v Board of Education ruling; voting rights and school integration were coming to a head.

On May 17, 1954 the US Supreme Court had ordered public schools desegregated and the watershed case overturned the separate-but-equal doctrine. The Warren Court's unanimous (9–0) decision stated that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" and paved the way for integration and the modern civil rights movement.

The watershed case overturned the separate-but-equal doctrine, which dated back to the 1896 decision in Plessy versus Ferguson and Southern segregationists vowed to oppose this ruling, labeling the day of issuance as Black Monday. A white supremacist organization, "Citizens Councils," was quickly formed, with its first meeting taking place in the Sunflower County seat of Indianola.

Brown II, issued one year later, on May 31, 1955 decreed that the dismantling of separate school systems for blacks and whites could proceed with "all deliberate speed."

In early May of 1955, just three weeks before Brown II and almost four months before Emmett Louis "Bobo" Till was killed, Reverend George Lee, a grocery owner and NAACP field worker in Belzoni was shot and killed at point blank range while driving in his car after voting. A few weeks later in Brookhaven, Lamar Smith, another black man, was shot and killed in front of the county courthouse, in broad daylight and in front of witnesses, after casting his vote. Both men had been active in voter registration drives and no one was ever arrested in connection with either murder.

Till was just a kid, a black kid from Chicago who had limited ideas about racial politics or an old man called Jim Crow with unspoken rules that varied town by town. Till's mother had given her son some warning, based on her own experiences living in Mississippi as a young girl but her stern talk didn't sink in.

When she learned her son was dead, Mrs. Till Mobley and the NAACP decided the whole world should know what happened to Emmett and held an open-casket funeral in Chicago, allowing a photograph of her son's disfigured face appear in Jet magazine:

"...for over four days, thousands of people saw Emmett's body. Many more blacks across the country who might not have otherwise heard of the case were shocked by pictures that appeared in Jet magazine. These pictures moved blacks in a way that nothing else had. When the *Cleveland Call and Post* polled major black radio preachers around the country, it found that five of every six were preaching about Emmett Till and half of them were demanding that "something be done in Mississippi now," wrote Juan Williams in his classic *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*.[134]

Mississippi's largest newspaper, *The Jackson Daily News*, termed the murder "brutal" and "senseless," but complained that the NAACP was arousing "hatred and fear" by calling Till's murder a lynching. Civil Rights activist Rosa Parks of Montgomery, Alabama saw the picture in the newspaper and encouraged by the NAACP decided there would never be a better time to take a stand, something she had been planning to do all along but for which she hadn't set a date. Thus, Emmett Till's lynching is said to have sparked the modern civil rights movement.

The trial was dramatic, with coverage by national and international reporters — a first for such a crime carried out in the United States.

In Belgium, two left-wing newspapers published articles on the acquittal.

Le Peuple, the daily Belgian Socialist newspaper, calling the acquittal "a judicial scandal in the United States."

Le Drapeau Rouge headlines announced "Killing a black person isn't a crime in the home of the Yankees: The white killers of young Emmett Till are acquitted!"

In France, the daily newspaper *Le Monde*, on September 27, ran an article titled, “The Sumner Trial Marks, Perhaps, an Opening of Consciousness."

But on the next day, in Germany, the newspaper *Freies Volk* published an article with the headline, "The Life of a Negro Isn't Worth a Whistle."

As the trial of J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant ended:

“Defense attorney John C. Whitten told the jurors in his closing statement, ‘Your fathers will turn over in their graves if [Milam and Bryant are found guilty] and I'm sure that every last Anglo-Saxon one of you has the courage to free these men in the face of that [outside] pressure.”

“The jurors listened to him,” wrote Juan Williams. “They deliberated for just over an hour, and then returned a ‘not guilty’ verdict on September 23rd, the 166th anniversary of the signing of the Bill of Rights. The jury foreman later explained, "I feel the state failed to prove the identity of the body."

After the murder trial of Milam and Bryant ended in September, with an all-white 12-man jury finding both men innocent in just 67 minutes, the two men later confessed their crime to a national magazine reporter.

In May of 2004, the U.S. Justice Department reopened the Emmett Till case after a young black filmmaker, Keith A. Beauchamp, produced a documentary articulating the madness of racism in the South of the 1950s. Then three years passed before a Leflore County Grand Jury decided not to prefer charges against Carolyn Bryant Donham and said no others were involved. The black Mississippi prosecutor wasn’t much help, refusing assistance from the FBI.

Once again, the crime is being reconsidered for opening. Meanwhile, few good words are spoken of the prosecutor, Joyce Chiles, by black Delta residents and others who wanted to see resolution. Some believe that she was compromised by local white planters.

It was not until October 7th, 2008, that the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act was actually signed into law by President George Bush who seemed to want to leave something positive of his poor civil rights record. This legislation provided the Justice Department with additional money and resources to investigate unsolved murders committed during the Civil Rights era.

While 422 members of Congress voted in favor of the bill, two voted against it, Rep. Ron Paul and Rep. Lynn Westmoreland. In the Senate, it had been blocked by Sen. Tom Coburn who, after much public criticism, finally ended his opposition. On September 24, 2008, the full Senate passed the Till bill by voice vote after Senator Coburn lifted his

hold. Putting aside that money is finally available to investigate this cold case and others, it still might fall to the former wife of a dead grocer, Carolyn Bryant Donham, to help bring final resolution to the Emmett Till matter.

Was Bryant's wife involved? Was she with her husband and others on that dark night in 1955 outside of Mose Wright's home? Who else was there? Did she point out young Emmett as the kid who embarrassed her in their small family grocery store?"

Donham was still residing in Greenwood in the fall of 2009. Some who are familiar with Till's murder believe that Donham was probably sitting inside the truck that early August morning in Money, waiting to identify Emmett Till when her husband shined a light in the young man's face, asking her if this was the right person, the young man who'd embarrassed her in his store.

She might tell her story some day, but probably she won't. Unless she finishes writing her own account for an unidentified publishing house as rumor has it. Will Carolyn Bryant Donham's book will be hitting the shelves in 2010?

ON AUGUST 13, 1993, Erle Johnston, former Sovereignty Commission director and the most powerful person to ever hold the position, sat down for an oral history interview with Yasuhiro Katagiri, a Fulbright scholar from Japan studying at the University of Southern Mississippi.[135]

Johnston waxed philosophic of his days growing up in Grenada and about the state spy organization he headed for five years — from 1963 to 1968 — giving a unique look into his own life and into the agency that served as Mississippi's "all-seeing eyes" in the modern Civil Rights Movement, his manner stereotypical of white Southern men involved in some of the cruelest and reprehensible acts against black people.
The honey always drips as stories like Johnston's slip, slide from their mouths. "I remember growing up…in a segregated town. I thought nothing about it. The town built a swimming pool. It was for whites only. Blacks never even tried to get in it."

"The picture show — blacks went upstairs and whites went downstairs. Nobody objected to it. So, we were always under the impression that they were satisfied with the relationship because — and this is the main reason — because never in my town of Grenada where I grew up, did a black family go hungry or a black family needed help that there wasn't white people that did it for them," Johnston said.

The grand idea," Johnston continued, "…was that we could turn the Sovereignty Commission into a big public relations agency…in order to try to project Mississippi outside the state as a good place to be, as a good place to work, as a good place to settle down."

"Of course we recognized that one civil rights murder was worse than a hundred blacks getting Ph.D. degrees, you know. But the idea was that we could try as much as we could

to overcome the attitude outside Mississippi that we were a lawless state as far as race was concerned. "We never got anywhere with it."

Johnston blamed the failure on hippies and the summer of 1964 or Freedom Summer, a campaign launched in June to attempt to register as many African American voters as possible in Mississippi.

Until then, black voters were almost always excluded, despite the efforts of black Mississippians like Birdia Keglar, Adlena Hamlett, Sam and Margaret Block, Jimmy Travis, Amzie Moore, Aaron Henry, Dr. T.R.M. Howard, Cleve McDowell, Fannie Lou Hamer and so many others.

The project was organized by the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a coalition basically pulled together by Aaron Henry and Amzie Moore from four established civil rights organizations:

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), with SNCC playing the lead role.

Poor old Johnston probably never knew what hit him that hot Mississippi summer when the project opened its doors.

Besides the white, uppity college students coming into the state, so many others followed along, including famous activist entertainers like Bob Dylan who set up in Drew, where he taught little black kids how to sing folk songs. Or Joan Baez, who considered taping herself to a schoolyard swing set in Granada during an explosive riot — and was forcibly stopped by others who knew she would be killed.

Imagine. "All these invading people from around the country came in and upset Mississippi," Johnston said. "They went around dressed slovenly and long hair and fingernails … always confronting people and creating riots. The governor had to get the highway patrol increased to take care of [them].

"Had that not happened, Governor Paul Johnson would have had Mississippi sailing right on into the twentieth century."

Sure, Mr. Johnston. Uh, huh.