



# THE AMERICAN SOUTH

## RISE OF A NEW CONFEDERACY

In a troubled corner of the country, something vaguely subterranean is welling up. It seems, at once, an apprehension of the final catastrophe or the huge breathing of a vast organism, or perhaps the anonymous mobility of some mute ghost that yearns to make itself known. The American South—a land of labored fables, shared glories, soil, blood, brassy vanity and souls spun tight together in patterns of tradition—remains an intricate, fugal overlay of clashing passions: Gentility and violence, humanism and hatreds, beliefs and brutalities, obscurities, incongruities, cadenzas of humor, Sweet Jesus and unknowable madness. Add to this an infinitude of traumas and small transformations, multiply by 38 million whites, 11 million blacks plus every possible variable of the past, the present, the climate



and the terrain, and you extract today a place where nothing whatever is the same. Yet you draw from this, too, a people who in being forced to find pragmatic new realities of their own, may well forge prophetic insights into the very root of all human hearts.

BY WILLIAM HEDGEPEETH LOOK SENIOR EDITOR PHOTOGRAPHS BY AL CLAYTON

continued



"Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live at all?"

You can't understand it. You would have to be born there."

William Faulkner  
Absalom, Absalom!

In those warmer Atlanta evenings, after supper, my friend and I would sit out under the trees with Hattie and open our heads to all the subtle frights and splendors of God's Creation: Like tales of birds that carried off colored babies, and plants that actually spoke, and of how, if only you were quick enough, you could toss a pine knot in a whirlwind and thereby behold the leering face of Satan.

At intervals, when she paused to recollect a fact or spit snuff-juice, my friend and I, in the silence, would suddenly grow aware of all the utter ominousness that surrounded us. The darkening warmth, the crickets and night critters, the shifting autumnal colors, moving air in the tops of big pines—all at once everything was fraught and wrought by spirits. (And sometimes our friend Bump, who was Hattie's boy, would be with us, too, and would start moaning at about this point or hoot like an owl just to add to the anguish.) Then Hattie would spit. And sigh. Maybe now she'd talk some history—about how there sits this big mansion south of here in Jonesboro where Scarlett O'Hara lived when she shot that Yankee soldier on the staircase. "Shot dat Yankee straight through th' head. An' you can tell where he fell 'cause when it rains the bloodstain rises up in the carpet." We glowed. Total awe. We could see that Yankee and all that blood. And then we'd scrooch up a little closer and listen on as the night continued to close in upon us, with all its memories and apparitions and vague longings . . . and as Hattie's face became lost in darkness, leaving only a maid's white uniform, the sound of snuff and a black voice filled with all the mythic visions and warnings our minds could contain.

The intricate intertwinings of black and white lives has shaped at least some portion of every Southerner's soul. Here, wrote W. J. Cash in *The Mind of the South*, the relationship between the races was "nothing less than organic. Negro entered into white man as profoundly as white man entered into Negro—subtly influencing every gesture, every word, every emotion and idea, every attitude."

In large part, the South is this: It is black and white and the eternal question of how the two interact, contrast, love, hate, relate, interdepend—or just how exactly can ever it be determined (if at all) the point at which one stops

and the other starts. Or, most importantly, in light of the altering identity of the South itself, there's the question of who we are, both to ourselves and in the eyes of each other.

The last time I saw Bump was at his twelfth-birthday party. He was well-developed for his age and would soon be starting full-time farm work. And I recall the strange perception within myself and in him—a sort of acceptance of a something that didn't need to be said—that beginning about then, and from that point on, we would no longer be boys to whom color was absurdly irrelevant; we were to be Negro and white, with all the mutual exclusivities that those tags implied. And we would neither play nor swim together again nor anything else, for "race" now meant barrier. Beyond that point, his humanness would take second place behind his primary new identity as another of those fearful dusky phantoms against whom the American South was officially structured to protect itself.

From this, I became personally aware of the South as a region of strange protocols and exasperating psychological defenses, the likes of which make this kind of thing completely proper and even benign. Still, it's hard to define. The South, as a state of mind, is a near-unfathomable maze molded by tradition, ancestry, caste, race, poverty, ties of kinship, and the sensation that non-Dixie eyes are forever watching, and disapproving.

The Northerner regales himself with images of a muggy, gothic land of magnolia trees and lynching bees, docile darkies (and men with whips), greasy orators in string ties, hopeless, shoeless *Tobacco Road* red-necks who can sprout fangs on command, a Kluxer at every crossroads, a troll beneath every bridge—and everyone muttering third-grade grammar in an idiotic, stylized patois. It's this sense of hostile perusal from the outside that helps perpetuate the concept of the South not merely as a matter of geography but as a phenomenon, an object of patriotism.

Actually, it's a rich complexity of fierce and fragile elements. The 11 ex-Confederate States hold only 24 percent of the nation's total population, yet over half of all its blacks. It is the most physically isolated part of the country, yet it is 54 percent urban; the most agrarian-minded, yet everywhere manufacturing outstrips farming as the main source of income. It is the most intensely Christian corner of the country, and the most openly racist.

More deeply, though, the Deep South is a sense of shared experience and common consciousness. Its myths and legends—transmitted orally in the tradition of medieval minstrels—serve as symbols of regional allegiance: parables, prophecies, prejudices, epic dreams, glorified reminiscences, laws, shibboleths, lurking demons and tales

## The South, as a state of mind, is an unfathomable maze of tradition, race, poverty and ties of kinship

of things held sacred by the tribe.

A part of the shared experience of Southernness is the awareness that this is the single area of America that has suffered a great defeat, that has undergone an extended period of deprivation, and that—as a result of Southerners forcing the doctrinal attitude toward black men to operate side by side with the Christian stance toward men in general—has lived with a general sense of muted guilt.

It is also the only area of the nation that has been legally and morally compelled not only to admit wrongness but to purge itself of deeply held delusions that had hardened into Southern laws and people's lives.

As if the assault of court decisions and civil rights acts weren't enough, Southern white folk in the early 1960's suddenly found themselves thrust alive and kicking into the depths of what had always been that most unthinkable ancestral nightmare ever to skulk in their collective unconscious: visions of Federal troops, Government lawyers with Brooklynese accents, sassy pickaninnies parading into white schools, SNCC, CORE, COFO, Freedom Riders and battalions of scraggelly Yankee clerics and college kids determined to "save" the South during semester break. And on top of it all, the Northern press, primed for the delightfully disgusting sight of inevitable atrocities. And network TV endlessly running films of teary-eyed, noble Negroes and bearded whites and maybe—Lawd a-Mighty—Martin "Lucifer Coon" himself marching somewhere, droning "We Shall Overcome."

Yet, after a time, the Northern kids and cameras pulled out, went home, got involved in a myriad other social ailments—and left the Southern racial struggle back in the hands of those Southerners who had started the battle to begin with. So, the outsiders came and went, and now even the old civil rights "Move-ment" itself has become so fragmented and unfashionable that for all practical purposes it poses no mass-scale threat to Southern sensi-

A part of the changing meaning of the South: A black peers over the back of a mule—not on a farm but on the road with other protest marchers.









## THE SOUTH CONTINUED

bilities. What it left behind, though, is a region colored by dangerous and rapidly deteriorating passions. It left a land still shaped by its traditions of truculence, individualism, sentimentality, sectionalism and a residue of Negrophobia. But most importantly—it left among white humankind a new consciousness. People forced to encounter themselves, to rethink their basic contentions and have their dark, unwritten, tribal rites revealed to their eyes in the garish glare of 1,000 neon suns simply would never, never see themselves the same again. And this in spite of ever-more-militant black posturings. And this in spite of outbursts from hard-shell segs impaled on the past watching in frustration as more and more whites become “traitors to the South.” And this in spite of Spiro and the “Southern Strategy” with all its cozenings and subtle incitements and arousings of futile old notions.

The Southland has been expanding, evolving, urbanizing and always seeming so much to be on the teetering brink of some New Day that people periodically hoot (as they have been since the term was coined in the 1870's) about a NEW SOUTH—meaning, one gathers from the description, a vast, industrialized, happy sweatshop with a level of grace and humanity comparable to what one finds in, say, New Jersey.

Well, there ain't no New South. There is, however, a place where the essential intimacy of life is valued, where people can still touch and talk with one another, where there remains a sense of humanity that outranks abstract economic concerns, a sense of mysticism and an ability to believe. There is a place where blacks and whites—new-

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There linger dreams of some mythical Old South, a sadness and a sense of something precious lost

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ly moved by their new consciousness—are probing for a new sense of their own identities. What may be aborning, then—is not another New South but a New Southerner.

That's what we set forth to find. Photographer Al Clayton, who lives in Tennessee, and I, a Georgian, trekked off in an old pickup truck down coiled hot, blacktop roads and into the backwaters, boondocks and possum crossings in search of the South, the flesh and feel of our home, caught up now in a time of its—of our—becoming something else.

Scenes light up: Hot, dry fields; de-

*serted tin-roofed shacks weathered raw and growing over with vines and roses; blacks rocking on creaky porches in the heat; children in swings made from old tires; “Get Right With God”; meaty sawmill girls with ratty teased-up hairdos and thick eye makeup blowing pink bubble gum; two blacks brush-scrubbing at a sea of identical tiny tombstones for Union troops who died in the prison at Andersonville, Ga.; each small town's sacred spire to “Our Confederate Dead.”*

Because the South is so diverse—and up until now so isolated, even from other parts of itself—little of its tradi-

tion has common meaning for all the people. There is, though, a genuine familial quality when folks speak of “The South” or of Southernness. And, too, there linger the splended dreams of some mythical Old South before the Civil War (termed “the late unpleasantness”) . . . and a sadness and a hazy sense of something precious lost.

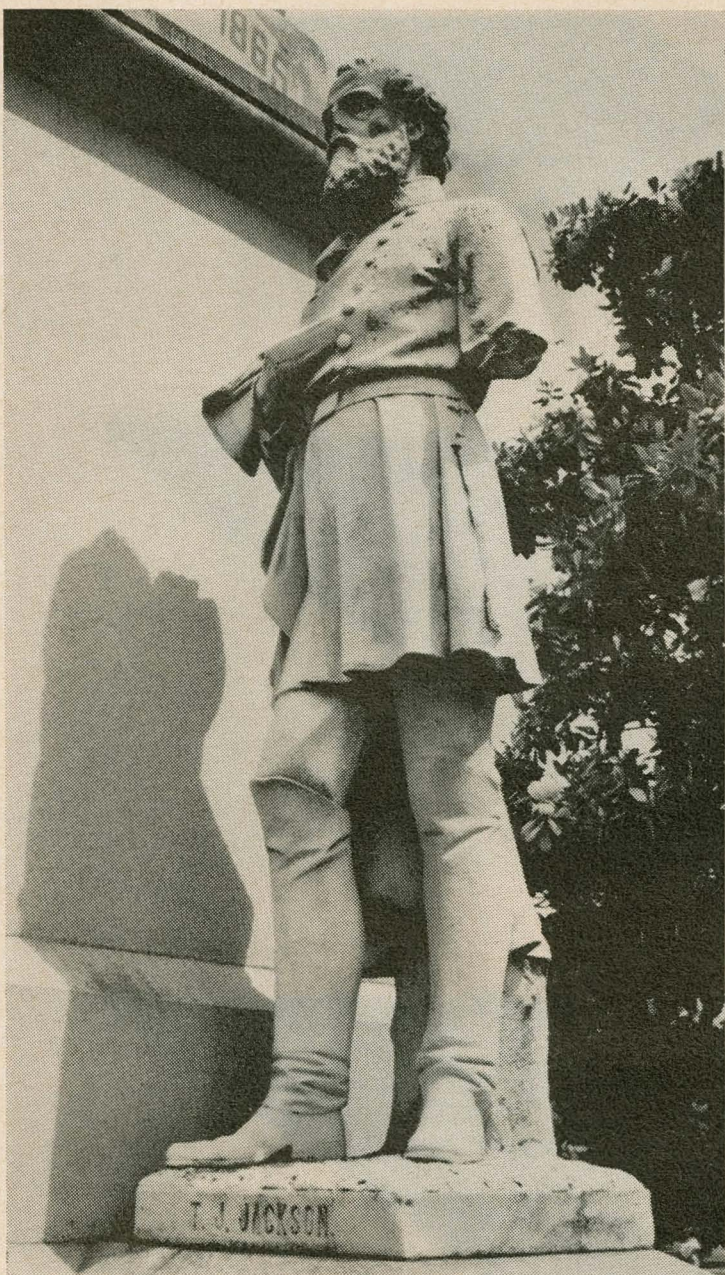
“May this shaft ever call to memory the story of the glory of the men who wore the gray.” That's what it says on the spire next to the courthouse in Hawkinsville, Ga. But today there's a diminishing citizenry to be reminded. Like most little towns steeped in mem-

ories and stalked by ancestral ghosts, Hawkinsville is inhabited by mostly older folk. “We've got no drug problem here, no youth problem,” notes the police chief. “Got no youth,” snorts another officer. “Yeh,” shrugs the chief, “When they get outta school, they scatter. Nothin' to hold 'em here, I guess.”

But those youth who remain serve as the focal point for local racial anxieties. A court order calling for a precise percentage balance of black and white teachers in the local schools inspired the quick erection of a private school (or “segregation academy”). “Most







Above left, William and Stella Hamilton on Daufuskie Island, an enclave out of the mainstream of the Southern Way of Life. Ghosts of bygone years: "Stonewall" in Hawkinsville, Ga.; an antebellum ruin in Miss.; an empty farmhouse anywhere.

people, though, feel the situation's here and we've gotta live with it and do the best we can," says Hugh Lawson, a young lawyer. "But please, God, just protect us from these Negro teachers."

Out by the spire, two elderlies sit, whittle and mutter back and forth the

old refrains: "... shovin' it down the South's throat ... last straw ... race warfare ... blood in th' streets ... gone too fur. ..." But there's no longer much life in what they say. Just the awareness that they, like others, sense what seems to be the eerie eating-away at everything once taken for granted. Beside the spire, the statue of Stonewall Jackson has lost an arm and nose.

Two blocks away, Hawkinsville's residential section (as in most Southern towns) has families of blacks and whites living in easy shouting distance of each other, or across the street from one another or sometimes in houses

side by side. In short, conditions of de facto *integration*, under which the races are held apart only by a fragile formality and a mutual knowledge of doctrinal apartheid. It's a phenomenon perhaps rooted in the primeval familiarity and apprehension of things closest to you: not hate but *fear* of blacks, *fear* of other whites, fear that some terrible specter might be offended. Everyone on a tightrope. Paranoid schizophrenia as an accepted way of life.

William Hamilton—white-haired, black-skinned and tattered, but eminently dignified—wears an oil leaf wrapped

around his arm to draw the fever from a pain. He has worked a while in his garden but hasn't had to put out much effort, for everything grows with a wild jungle eagerness. William and Stella live upon their seven-acre plot amid the lushness and tranquillity of Daufuskie Island—which is completely severed, if not hidden, by way of a maze of intercoastal channels, from the South Carolina mainland.

Daufuskie is a woodsy expanse of Spanish-moss-draped trees, vegetable gardens and paintless wood houses half-buried in foliage, where dwell about 150 descendants of the slaves who worked the Island's soil when it was divided up among plantations, and who were either given the land or bought it from the owners "after the Freedom." A few families of whites live on one end of the Island, where also exists the single radio-telephone connecting Daufuskie to the outer world.

For years, oysters and clams were the economic mainstay—up until the beds became polluted by industries dumping waste into the Savannah River. Nowadays, the people try to sustain themselves by farming or fishing or working on the channel dredges. "But we're hopin'," says Mrs. Julia Johnson, "to get more young people to agree to come back after they've gotten an education and help us here."

When they reach high school level, the children have to board with relatives on the mainland in Bluffton, S.C. Until that time, they attend the Island's neat, two-room school. On one of the bulletin boards: "ABRAHAM LINCOLN," by Susan Smith. "You have heard about Abe Lincoln. He freed the slaves. He wanted to keep our country from splitting into two countries. ..."

Up at the Daufuskie Community Improvement Club, Miss Jones, a retired teacher and resident wise-woman, helps some other black ladies with handicrafts they hope to sell. The people here are extremes in gentleness. "Oh yesyes, it's always been better here than on the mainland," nods Miss Jones. "Never any tradition of meanness to uphold. Even long before my time whites and blacks got along well together. Each loves the other, depends on the other to exist here on this little island." Whenever other coastal islands have been linked to the shore, they've lost their distinctiveness and become consumed and embroiled in the social patterns and racial feelings of the white mainland. "I suppose," Miss Jones says with a slow shrug, "as we become modernized ... a bridge will probably be ... an inevitable thing."

*Great God, what are we and what do we wreak upon each other? Manic, frantic clotting up of tiny webs of life. Yas'm, no'm, Hattie Hannah Clyde Claude Essie Bessie Rastus Rufus Beulah Maude Coreen: O, meet me, Jesus, meet me, meet me in the middle of the air. ... Ahhh, let 'em go. Flow off with-*

continued







"I think Hitler was too moderate. He didn't have anywhere near the race problem we got."

*out a whimper backward on the current into darkness, into ancient pools of obsidian glassy black cacklings. Rhythmic pulse of lives beat away in squelched flesh, locked out, apart. Ahhh, let it go. Swirl and roll and drift back. Back where half-fossilized old women crouch mad in columned hulks of old plantation houses and rave at walls. Back to bands of relentless mourners and refugees from lands that never were. Let go. Let it go. Let flow on back to atavistic ape-folk on the shore leaping frightened around small fires in closing darkness, incantating, warding off the Night, the Primal Nigger. Back to smother, gag in rancid heat and choking rebel banners, banal madness, out of focus . . . flowing slowly to the dankmost corner in the soul . . . of something. Glimmerings of vanished kinsmen with reptile skins and hateful faces. Ancestral apparitions coiled tight, tight, tighter, ahhh! And . . . a blind black flicker in the depths of the orbs. Floating, driving, spiraling down deep and deeper toward some final innermost intensity. Never mind. Yes, let it go. Let it all go. A fanfare, brutal and infuriate. And . . . a great silence . . . a gargantuan, fearsome silence . . . an awesome, brooding, drowsing tumbling silence. And a slamming tight-shut of great green metallic jaws.*

J.B. Stoner sits behind his desk and grins. Beside him is the thunderbolt-embazoned banner of the National States Rights party, a group about as far ultra-right as it's possible to get without spinning straight off the edge of the earth. Stoner, 46, has been its national chairman. Before that he was a Klan organizer. Officially, he's a lawyer, in which role he represented James Earl Ray. But now he's gunning for greater things: He is a candidate for governor of Georgia, and I am here in his command center in Savannah listening to this eerie pastiche of anti-Jew & anti-niggerisms that make up his platform. Stoner's eyes are simultaneously dazed-dull and glittering with spicy ire. He's the kind of person who, even when you're sitting face-to-face

with him, seems to be peering at you from around a corner. Any moment now I expect live toady-frogs to leap from his mouth. "I am," he beams, "the candidate of love. I love the white race. I am the only candidate who runs as a white racist."

Stoner says he decided to run because the racial situation has reached "crisis level" owing to the fact that "the nigger revolutionaries and Jew revolutionaries are concentrating on Georgia now like they once concentrated on Alabama and Mississippi." His platform calls for "resettling" blacks back in Africa "as a long-term measure"; but for the present, he would, as governor, allocate funds for one-way tickets ("and traveling expenses") to New York or Canada, "where everybody loves 'em and where the Jews and niggers are already in political control."

After going on a bit more about "jungle blood" and niggers being paid by the Government "to breed illegitimately," he declares: "I think Hitler was too moderate. He didn't have anywhere near the race problem we got." And then his final note: the difference between himself and the other candidates is, "I'm not a hypocrite."

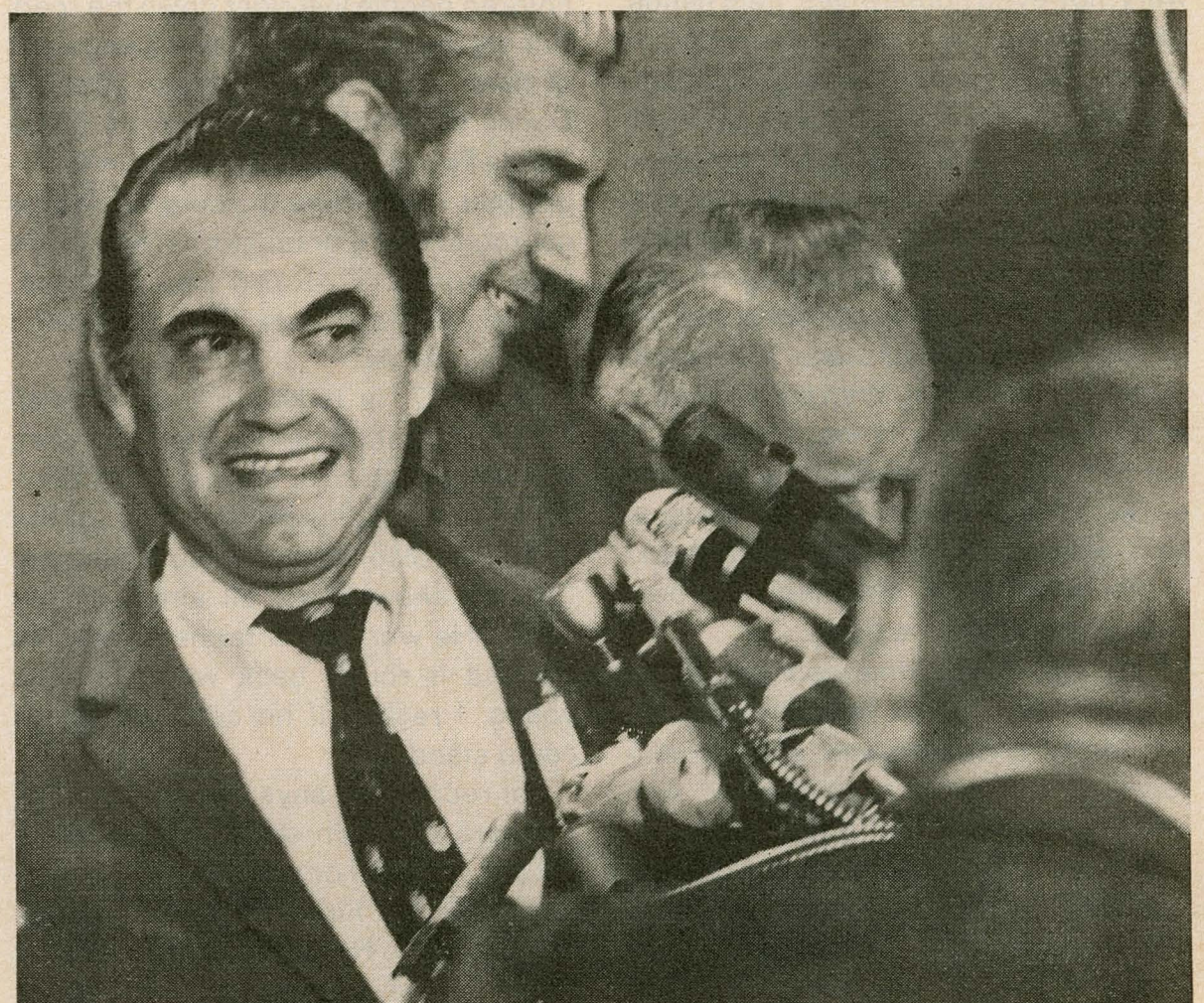
The value of paleolithic political utterances like these—and of a candidate like J.B. Stoner—is that after the initial gulp you realize that it's not a great deal more extreme than the sort of stuff the average politicians felt they had to say to get elected around these parts just 20 or so years ago. It also sensitizes masses of people who may harbor vague racist notions as to how utterly vulgar their views sound from the mouth of a first-rate race-baiter. Stoner took three percent of the vote in the September primary—and in doing so, served to remind Southerners of the kind of

cotton-patch Fascism we've hopefully risen above.

Dixie politics have always been a razzle-dazzle display of public figures in perpetual tantrum spouting bombastic trivialities and rousing endless armies of gargoyles from the lower depths to frighten folks to the polls. "Conservative" and "liberal" lose all meaning here; a raving Bolshevik might well be acceptable as long as he displays a knee-jerk negativism when it comes to Negro rights.

**B**ut with the accumulation of civil rights realities and the slow spread of new consciousness (not to mention new Negro voters), politics have taken on a different and somewhat fatalistic flavor. Politicians—perceiving deep down that racial questions have largely been removed from their hands—still feel the need to go through obligatory rituals of racism and xenophobia and self-justifying displays of muscle and resolve—i.e., "standing in the schoolhouse door," baring the breast to Federal bayonets, being jailed "in defense of Dixie," etc.—to show the voters, and to assure themselves, that the sacred icons won't be surrendered to the Feds without a fight. Most are aware, though, that eventually the whole thing is impossible, that, as one confided, "you can't prevail against it." Yet they persist, knowing the Southern fascination for lost causes, realizing they won't win—and possibly even *hoping* for defeats so that they can feel relieved of the issue (and the guilt) for once and for all.

The extent to which George Wallace speaks for the South is limited to those Southerners who have the most intense mystic affinity for losing battles—



Politics of perpetual "againstness": J.B. Stoner (left) in the National States Rights party HQ; George Wallace (right) victorious on runoff election night in Montgomery, Ala.



## THE SOUTH CONTINUED

the aged or fading, the never-quite-made-its, the pugnacious, the "po' white trash," the red of neck. But meanwhile, until their Final Great Defeat is felt—whereupon, presumably, they will become lost in ecstasy or paralytic joy—they can be a goddamn mean-acting bunch of folks.

For classic gothic ire, for bottomless wells of spite and grudge, for Dixiefied race hatred on display in all its most regal rottenness, lo, nothing can undo Montgomery, Ala., on election night in the Wallace camp; whooping codgers with pants pulled up to their ribs; slicked-down ruralized Mafiosi types; fat, straggle-haired female segs with screechy voices ("Go, George, go"); farmers sullen in their first city suits; sleazy-eyed 2nd-string political hacks with Hav-A-Tampas jutting from their jowls. And Wallace's campaign tabloid with its red headline: "UNLESS WHITES VOTE ON JUNE 2 BLACKS WILL CONTROL THE STATE."

It's a great day for the white race. Wallace is beating not only Governor Brewer but all the Nixon henchmen who worked for his defeat. Wallace! Wallace! Never lost a race in Alabama, never won a single battle for the Southern Way of Life. He's charmed. Who else could make a single heroic gesture in a schoolhouse door and wind up with the entire state being put under court order to integrate? That's style. Florida's Gov. Claude Kirk—enhancing the Ku Klux coloration of the GOP in Dixie—tried the same stunt in April and just ended up being fined by a court and being elevated a mere notch higher in the annals of buffoonery.

Wallace has just come forth, claimed victory for the cause of "Alabama keeping her place in the sun," and left the mob in a frenzy of yippies and yahoos. They're all here now and momentarily triumphant: The sullen, the ever-wary, hot-eyed housewives, field hands, ribbon clerks, mule-collar salesmen, on and on. They share the standard Southerners' vision of themselves as a minority group—misunderstood, put-upon, ridiculed, alienated from the national conscience. Wallace doesn't lead them on to any new understanding of anything; rather, he just confirms and reinforces them in their place. Institutionalized Red-neckism. With the vote all in and the mob gone home, the room is left to one crusty hostile in dark glasses, who sits beside a stack of newspapers waving a Confederate flag, rocking back and forth, chanting: "we beat 'em, we beat 'em, we beat . . ."

Out again into the country: *Franchised fried-chicken emporiums bearing names of country-music stars; chiropractic clinics; a hand-lettered sign offering "Leeches for Sale"; Ease Oil for Arthritis; Dixie Peach Hair Pomade; "Bubba loves Moose" scrawled on a railroad overpass; the soulful wail of Gospel music; the deep belief that God prefers Purina Hog Chow; the conviction*

*that something called The South will somehow "rise again."*

"...hoppers, beetles and things that suck cotton to death. Lord, time you go ta fightin' insects, there ain't nothin' left." J.T. Bratcher pauses, adjusts his overall strap. "I've heard people profess 999 uses for soybeans, but I don't know 'em. I jest patch-farm. Jest somethin' to live on and somethin' to freeze for winter."

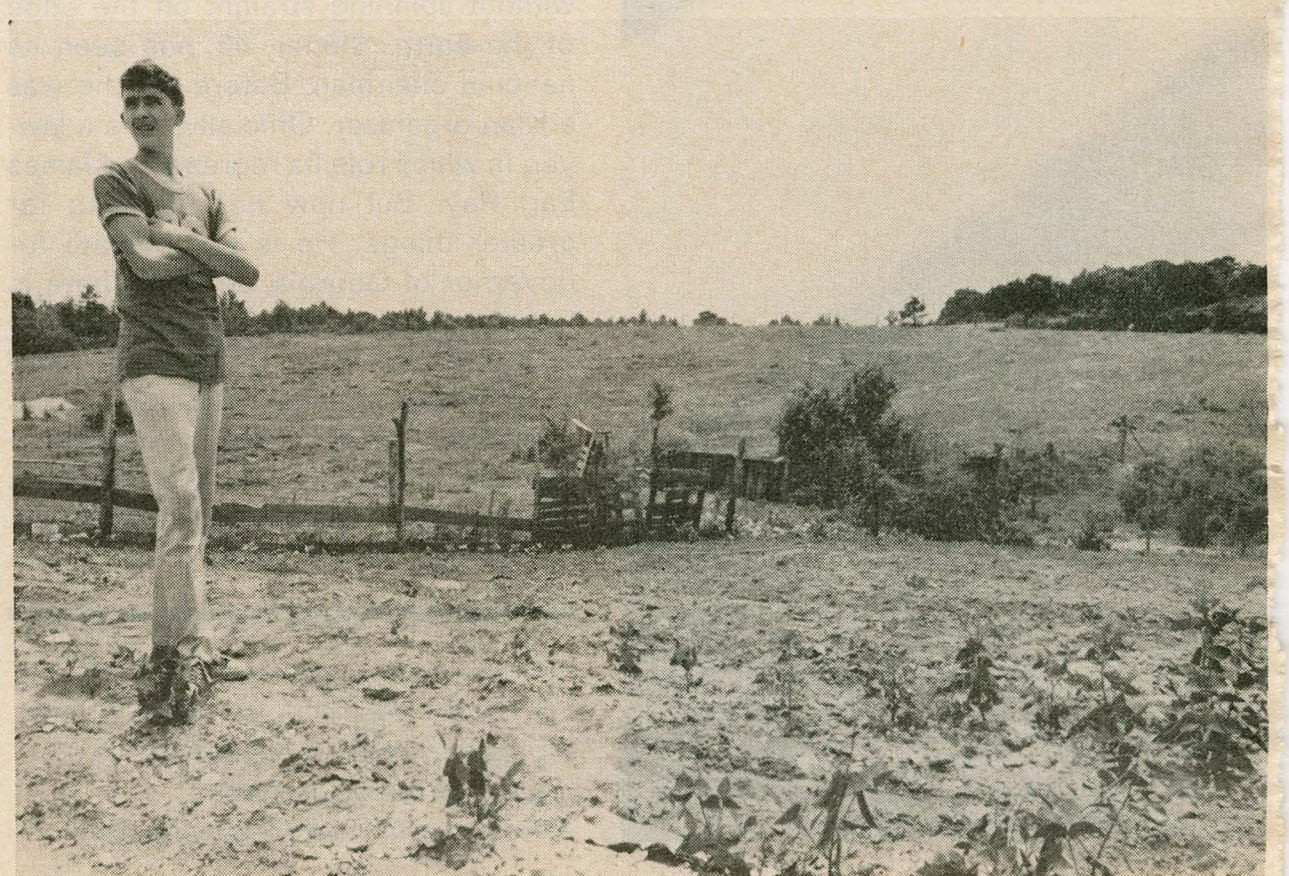
J.T. Bratcher—with his wife and six of his nine children and hogs and chickens and ducks—lives on a tiny farm in Craytonville, S.C., out of the mainstream of most things and generally unmoved by Wallace-style hootings about the Federal-Commie-Nigger Threat. "I don't know if they's Democrats or 'Publicans around here. Jest pore people, I reckon. Darkies don't give no partickle trouble at all. They tend to their business and we tend to our'n."

**T**he very moral pluck-and-yowl of a country tune on the radio flows out into the yard, where three hogs snooze beneath a walnut tree and J.T. Bratcher sits beside an overturned wringer-washer. The yard is filled with four junked cars, a pen once used for doves, a broken turn-plow, busted bicycles, old tires, a metal bed frame, hens that scratch and dab the ground and a white cat without a tail.

Inside, Mrs. Bratcher irons to the sound of the *Harper Valley P.T.A.* She apologizes for the house. "We jest call it a hut, but h'its a place to live." On the living room walls hang eight calendars, most of them with pictures of Jesus. Craytonville, she says, hasn't changed since she was young. But it's a little thicker-populated now. "They's colored people live right down the road. But we don't have no disturbance out of them," she says. Fourteen-year-old Danny adds that he hears from sister Jackie Fay, who chicken-farms in Georgia, that "over there the colored people go 'round and tear up stores. Make 'em lose money. Colored people here, though, they's friends. They just be like regular people."

Allen, 17, is tinkering with a small tractor in a shed before going to work in nearby Belton. In addition to school, he works the all-night shift at a cotton mill. He also handles farm chores. "Daddy showed me all about it," he says. "He worked on farms all his life. He had it rough back when he was young. I reckon if he could stand it I could stand it."

For recreation, says Allen, he and his brothers and twin sister Allene watch TV, play softball or ride horses. "Sometimes, up by Fire Station 21, bands come to play. No dance stuff. Just play music and have cakewalks." The major recent change in life here has been the







“Darkies don’t give no partickle trouble at all. They tend to their business and we tend to our’n.”

Above, J.T. Bratcher, a small farmer in the rural reaches of South Carolina: “Man’s got to live somewhere. Can’t live out in the woods like a rabbit.” At left, Allen Bratcher, who farms, goes to school and works all night at a cotton mill.

integration of the local school; but, says Allen, “The students and other folks don’t say nothin’ about it. Ain’t no need to.”

Allen’s brother Paul will soon graduate from high school and work full-time at the mill. Allene says she will, too. But for the moment, she’s hooked on softball. Allene is a slender, pretty brunette who wears blue jeans, a jersey and no shoes whenever possible. “You jest *might* get married an’ start a family,” J.T. tells her. And Allene makes a face. And Mrs. Bratcher swears, “She’s jest a tomboy.”

The Bratcher kids have gathered out front to play ball. J.T., who has a heart ailment, rests outside on an old lounge chair with his visor-cap shading his face. Now and then, he opens his eyes, pulls a pocket watch from his overall bib, looks, tucks it back and lies still.

Allene, meanwhile, mans the pitcher’s mound. Allene is clean-limbed, well-formed and emanates a glow of unrealized attractiveness, rustic sensuality. (“She ain’t never had a date,” Allen scoffs.) She is wrapped now in concentration, moving with a natural, mindless grace, hair blowing in the wind. On her hand is a heavy leather baseball glove. Low hog-rootings come from the pen.

The reality of these rural lives fails to provide much room for abstractions like unremitting racism. Occasionally, they speak of wishing to have it all over with, because there’s too much else to worry about. More and more of their energies have to be invested in the chores of simple survival here on a small farm in a post-agrarian age. The land is what counts. And poor whites and blacks work it and live on it side by side, sharing it as a common cause,

sharing the sweet familiarity of its rhythms and the spiritual fascination of forcing the staples of life up out of its coarse red skin. They are moved by the earth. It puts things in perspective. “A man,” says J.T. Bratcher, “comes out just about as well in the long run right around here as he can anywheres.”

Small farms and farmers are a feature of the Southern landscape, now being eaten away by impersonal economic forces. And due, largely, to developments such as increased mechanization, the soil bank and the minimum wage, the landless class of black farmers (tenants, sharecroppers, day laborers) are the first to go. Some band together into co-ops, while others feel forced to migrate North and fuel the glutted disgruntlements of the ghettos. And still others migrate deeper South.

Section 29 is surrounded by land oppressively flat and striped with thin canals. Section 29 is precise-spaced rows of maddeningly uniform shanties, a mass latrine where none of the toilets works, a welter of accumulated decrepitude, litter, quiet deprivation and a dirty green school bus for carting black hands to the vegetable fields. Section 29 is also well-guarded—whether to keep its people in, or others out, isn’t clear. This is a company-owned migrant-labor camp outside Pahokee, Fla., wherein scores of blacks and a few Chicanos have languished without work for weeks now, awaiting word from “higher up.”

“Naw, suh, I ain’t gon’ ask NO white man *nothin’*,” Burn declares and punctuates it with a proud thrusting of his lower lip. And his wife, Nancy, declares, “Ooooooh, weeee,” in complete agreement. Burn and Nancy, both middle-aged, came from Belzoni, Miss., after seeing ads offering work contracts for those who would pay their way to Florida. “Dey say th’ celery got drowned out, but it’s been seven weeks since I worked. It ain’t like it s’posed to be,” Burn shakes his head. And Nancy shakes her head, “It sho’ ain’t like they tol’ us at Belzoni.” And Johnny, who’s been here for years and who’s ball-eyed drunk, begins quacking like a duck and striking mock prize-fighter poses.

“I been tryin’ to earn the money to buy me a fine home. Now, I got *nothin’*! I think Mississippi’s better than this,” Burn says. (“*Quackquack*,” says Johnny.) “I stayed in the service to try to make me the money fo’ a home. All through dat war”—Nancy instantly displays his dog tag as proof—“but I ’uz doin’ that fo’ the Newnited States. I didn’t want to go through all that an’ be a *slum* of the Newnited States. I just don’t understand why these bosses are *doin’* us like this. I love one another,” Burn pleads. “God said that. He didn’t say nothin’ ’bout the color.” And Nancy says, “A-men.” And Johnny freezes stiff, grins, then bursts into a flurry of quacks that carries across the com-

continued





pound, past the palm trees and out into the impersonal desperate emptiness of migrant-labored land.

Section 29 is one among a vast network of neo-slave quarters that dot the Florida flatlands. At peak season, they hold upward of 200,000 of the lowest-paid, least-protected, most intimidated class of workers in the country. American serfdom. "They haven't been into militancy or the whole black-ethnic

pride thing up till now," says Tom Carey, a young lawyer who aids the migrants. "But they're beginning!"

Otto stands before the black agglomeration with a fierceness in his face, thrusts up his fist and booms, "Soul power." And a choric roar replies, "SOUL POW-AH!" "Soul power," he shouts. And "SOUL POW-AH," reverberates the room. "I may be black" . . .

"AH MAY BE BLACK" . . . "but I am" . . . "BUT AH AM" . . . "somebody" . . . "SOMEBODY!" "Soul power," cries Otto. "SOUL POW-AH," they shriek. "Black power," he yells. And now the word is out: "BLACK POW-AH! . . . BLACK POW-AH! . . . BLACK POW-AH! . . ."

The wood-frame building here in Perry, Ga., crawls with fetid heat, flowing sweat and the flutter of hand fans,

most imprinted with the face of Martin Luther King, Jr. It started as a minor student protest over the firing of some black teachers by a black school official, but then local white leaders—responding reflexively to their inborn Southern fear of the ultimate slave uprising—stepped in and blew the issue up into a miasma of grand-scale grievances. So now it's come to this: a 150-mile march to Atlanta in protest of all





forms of white repression. . . . "An'," vows Otto, "we ain't gon' let *nobody* turn us 'round!" Soul powah.

The sun leans down hard upon the tar and asphalt. And slowly here it comes: a mule. Then a wagon with symbolic black-creped coffins, and next a column of about 200 marchers. Except for the plethora of Afros and dashikis, it looks like a replay of the 1960's. Old times in the South. Selma revisited.

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"AH MAY BE  
BLACK...  
BUT AH AM...  
SOMEBODY...."

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Even some of the whites look the same: The bearded ascetics, miscellaneous Northern undesirables, rigorously uglified females, middle-aged academics wearing do-rags—all the gang who've been in limbo since 1966 when the "Move-ment" went darkly militant and scrapped "black and white together" as a theme. But for the moment, at least, they're linked again and onto larger causes. Today, what with hippies

and student activists steadily being cast as America's new niggers, the black and white protesters can march together with a genuine sense of oppression that's finally really *shared*.

Along the route, old farmers stare or shake their heads at the lengthening column. Mostly those the marchers pass view them more in wonder than resentment. Things are different now. No skull-cracking cops. No big dogs.

continued



## THE SOUTH CONTINUED

Their songs—without the fire of fear behind them and the need for bolstering assurance from the sound of one another's voices—don't rouse.

Days more of marching, and now here looms Atlanta. And the group, grown to 2,000 and reinforced by thousands more, troops past the gold-domed capitol, clapping and rerunning all the old black battle hymns that once threw segs (who never sang) into icy fits of twitching.

**T**he Movement of the '60's, the creature founded on profound idealism and nonviolent redemptive love (and what must surely still stand as the most potent social force in this century), was born in Southern soil. It set out to dramatize the need to overhaul racist institutions. But in the process, through pure force of soul, the moral sensibility of the South was pulled in the undertow toward involuntary salvation.

Most lastingly, the movement served as catalyst for a new consciousness, beginning with a shattering of old values and perceptions ("They were always so happy before"), resulting in a mass awareness that suddenly neither blacks nor whites remained whoever they had thought themselves to be before. Who they were was something yet to be disclosed.

"Powaaaah to the peepuuulll... black, black powaah to the black, black peepuulll..." The march, swollen now with newer thousands, winds, flows like a fearsome river through the heart of Atlanta. Clerics, TV cameras, beards, beads, militants, dignitaries, *clap-clap-clap-clap*. Up past the big department stores, across a freeway overpass. A dozen songs at once. A sea of banners, and placards and slogans for all sorts of unconnected causes. Still, in the minds and eyes of most there flicks a glimmer of a common hope: that maybe we can make it happen once again; maybe we can reshape flames and make them flowers; maybe, maybe someone's watching. And remembers.

But it's different now. The civil rights phase of black emancipation—the nation-shaking days of nonviolent disruption, massive hopes and peaks of revolutionary transformation—is over. In its place has evolved a deeper radicalism, a getting at roots. It comes about, in part, because blacks are aware that they're more alone. In the '60's, 63 percent felt they could count on Federal leadership for human rights; three percent believe that now.

So what has taken shape is political guerrilla warfare, with countless young Negroes, "sensitized" in new consciousness, asserting their new black pride and power on the local level in their own hometowns. There's also grown a new movement made up of



black self-help groups, communes, co-op farms and every other manner of approach to the Promised Land, all of them composed of infinite personal assertions of selfhood—and all in quest of some common new identity.

Large black man, dark glasses, work clothes, boots, cowboy hat, crisp intensity: "We have very good relations with all the white folks around here. Especially the merchants and the mayor and the chamber of commerce leaders. But for social dealings, we don't do that. Don't want it." Cornelius X is on his own turf. Behind him, one of the largest tractors known to man snarls across a hill. Here, in Terrell County,

right in the dead center of Red-neckdom, deep in the bowels of South Georgia Kluxer country, a bunch of Black Muslims—for chrissake—have plopped themselves down and started farming. "We're trying to become as independent and self-sustaining as we possibly can, and *this*," explains Cornelius X with a shrug, "is the best way."

The Muslims own 2,000 acres here, on which they breed beef cattle (Black Angus), run a sophisticated dairy operation and plan to build a cannery. This serves also as headquarters for all four Muslim farms in the South, 35,000 acres in all. One farm in Alabama roiled up some white resistance re-

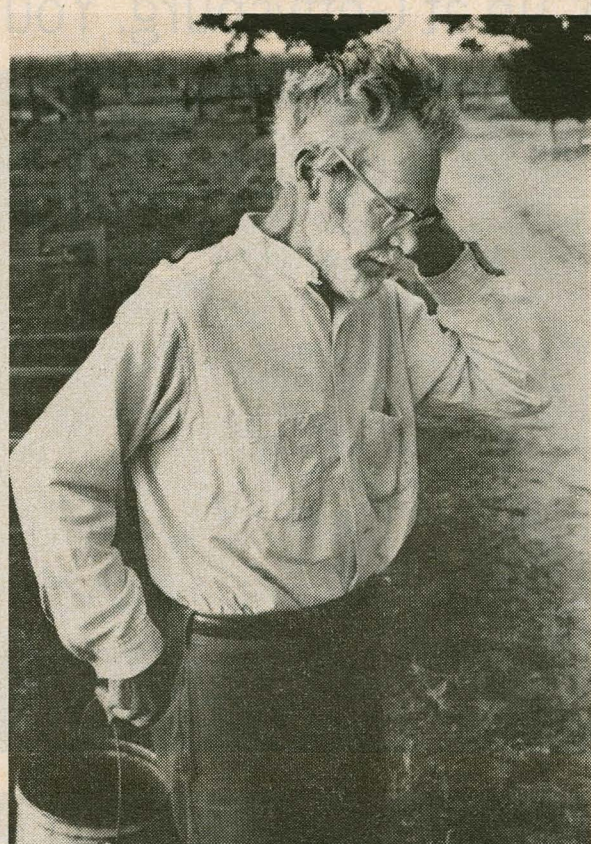
Above, Black Muslims breaking ground in Georgia. Says Cornelius X:

"We've got to go back to the soil to learn independence." Above right: Young and old at Koinonia, an interracial commune. Says Millard Fuller: "Nixon has given the racists new hope, but the tide of history is against them."

cently ("They thought we were headhunters or something"). But here in Terrell County, "they took more of a wait-and-see attitude."

What the whites have seen thus far in three and a half years is the injection of over \$500,000 into their local econ-





omy for construction work, supplies and the ultimate in farm equipment—"all paid in cash." What they've also seen is a seg's most treasured dream. "I never believed in demonstrations or marches or that integration was any solution," asserts the Muslim. "We take our lesson from Nature: cows stick with cows, horses with horses. Same with birds—blackbirds be with blackbirds, robins with robins. . . ."

The dozen Muslims here "just live a clean life," declares Cornelius X (a former Baptist deacon from Detroit), "following the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammed. We don't smoke, drink, fornicate, adulterate, go

to movies, horse races, indulge in idleness or any sports—whatever doesn't promote industriousness or progress us as a people, we don't indulge in it."

In business dealings, Cornelius is Cornelius Smith. But here he's X. "X" represents the unknown. I don't know what my name was back in Africa. It also means I'm 'X,' whatever I used to be—ex-Christian, ex-fool. . . ." He looks down and laughs softly to himself.

In Muslim eyes, the blacks who place their faith in whites or trust in Federal help are reaching the "explosion point" today. "It was looking good before the Nixon Administration. Now it don't look so rosy. Our mission is to go

back to the soil, to produce whatever we consume . . . and to show, here in the wilderness of North America, that we can be a separate people."

About 18 miles up the road from the Muslims lies Koinonia Farm, which has lived through first-class fever-seized orgies of armed racist violence, Ku Kluckery and relentless intimidation by local segs who could just never seem to bear the reality of blacks and whites living and working together in this place—as they've been doing since 1942.

Says Florence Jordan, whose late husband founded Koinonia (a New Testament Greek word for "togetherness"), "Communities are the best

places to learn to live together and love. You don't have to hide feelings."

Currently, the major project is the completion of the first 12 of 42 proposed houses, where dispossessed farm families can come to live.

"We hope," says Millard Fuller, "that they will join the rest of us here in the spirit of community, the spirit of sharing and Christian cooperation." Millard is a mid-30-year-old former lawyer and ex-millionaire Alabamian who dispensed all his money to human-rights groups in the South and then moved himself and his family here to Koinonia.

At the moment, in addition to the 30 or so regular members of the "family," some students are here for the summer, to work and to experience the community. "Here," says Millard, "the young people seem to get new hope. They find that right in the middle of Southwest Georgia, there's a place where race is simply irrelevant. These are the teachings of Jesus the Church has ignored.

"You know," says Millard as if he's never quite gotten over it, "the South, while it's the Bible Belt of the nation, at the same time is the most *militaristic* section, the most *materialistic*, most *racist*. It's the grossest irony that people in other parts of the country come

## The Southern Way of Life amounts to a daily violation of their best concepts of themselves

closer to the teachings of Jesus through ignorance than Southerners who study it. It's just that tradition and custom have gotten between them and Christianity, and they can't see clearly what the real message is all about."

This kind of schizoid social balance sits heavily on rural folk, who often choke back their Christianity and their better impulses out of fear of their own white society. To them, the Southern Way of Life amounts to a daily violation of their best concepts of themselves. In any case, it accounts for tensions and guilts and perhaps also the rural South's high rate of suicide.

"The white people of the South," Millard says, "are truly religious people. You start talking to the average man on the street about Jesus, and he'll get teary-eyed. But if you can get it through a man's head that what he has been doing is wrong, he will either scrap his faith or he'll change."

"When a Southerner gets converted, he *really* gets converted."

continued



## "We got us a battle comin' up at Gettysburg. You oughta come."

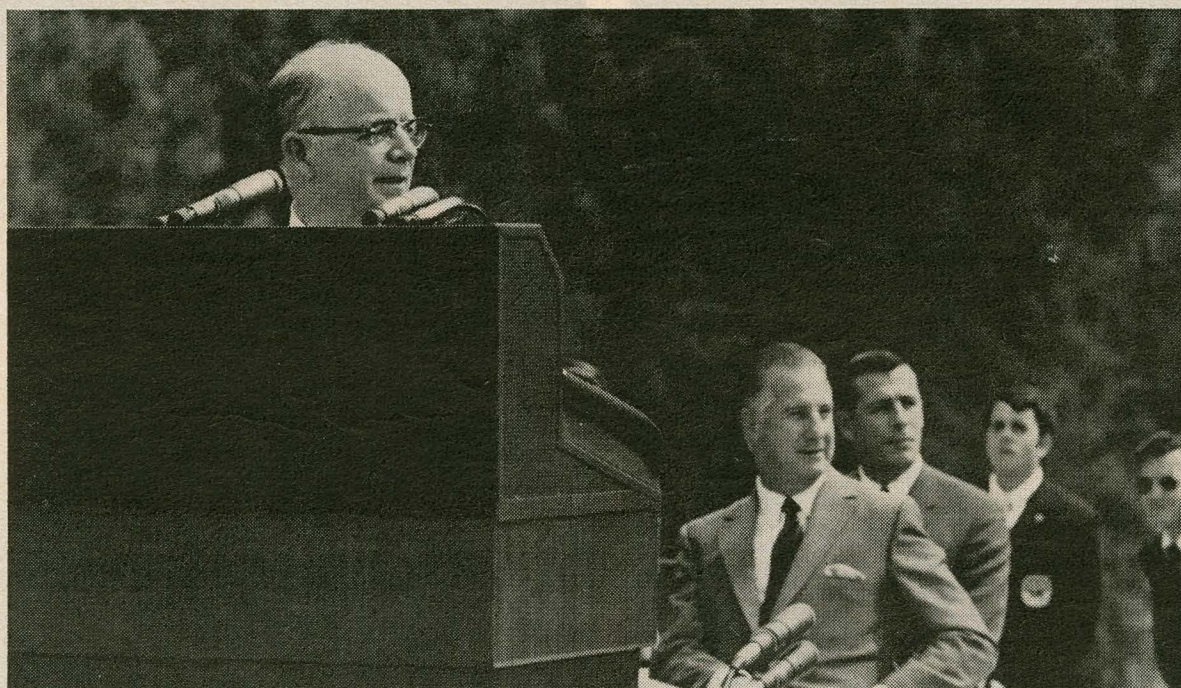
The resurgence of racism and recent talk of "resegregation" is just a "temporary setback," he believes. "I think we've come too far in terms of extending freedom to nonwhites to go back."

Like most other Southern communities whose schools remained hard-shell segregated up until now, those in nearby Americus have finally succumbed, by court order, to that awesome, consuming, great and galumphing specter of wanton ravagement and endless woe: the little black child. And though some white kids were hustled off to quick-built private schools, the parents of the rest didn't stage the classic last-ditch stand in defiance of integration. They just integrated. "If anything," says Millard, "parents felt relieved. Southerners feel a sense of relief when they have to do what they've been taught all their lives is right."

The same pattern seemed to hold throughout all the rest of the old Confederacy—94 percent of which is now "officially" desegregated. And in the various localities, the public attitude—if not of relief—was of resignation; or of a desperate craving by parents to make it work; or of theological predestination ("The Lord must of meant it that-a-way"); or, on the part of children, a great sense of adventure, or even aroused pride ("No colored people are gonna run me off," declared a small Alabamian). Yet behind most of the compliance was the simple economic desire of parents to keep their public school systems operating.

The major new outlet for Southern recalcitrance has sprung forth in the form of swarms of slapdash private segregation academies, currently serving as refuge for roundabouts of 400,000 children. These *ad hoc* institutions may hold forth in one-room hovels, old country stores or in anything else available. A preponderance, though, are reasonably housed, having been either set up or supported by one of darkest Dixie's two most staunch remaining bastions of anti-Mankindism: The White Citizens Council School Fund and the Institutional Church just around the corner. The Nixon Administration has also smiled upon these creatures by way of a tax-exempt status for any seg academies whose officers sign a pledge, cross-their-hearts-and-hope-to-die, that they are not for segregation. Ultimately, however, the panic that spawned this phenomenon will fade, particularly at about the time the parents realize that the mere indulging of their prejudices looms awfully large in the family budget.

"Yessir," says the captain, "We're Company I, 10th Virginia, Army of the Shenandoah. Fourteen strong!" Three other Confederate officers sitting on the station wagon tailgate (all members of some Civil War Centennial group that restages old battles) instantly strike demi-poetic poses. "We



At top, Lester Maddox and Spiro Agnew at dedication of world's largest Confederate Memorial. Above, busful of whites arrives at church-sponsored "segregation academy" in Macon, Ga. Left, flag-robed Rev. Mike Stark with some of his ministry in New Orleans' French Quarter.

Local dignitaries sit up on the platform looking dignitary, and Secret Servicemen slink through the crowd trying to spot hippies, and Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson and Jeff Davis stand out in huge relief on the granite mountainside, "an' ol' tar baby he don't say nothin'—an' Br'er Fox, he lay low."

The crowd erupts. He's arrived at last—"SPEEERO!"—come today to dedicate the largest Confederate Memorial on the Planet Earth carved right here on the side of Stone Mountain, not far from Atlanta.

"This is a Grreeeeat day for Jaw-juh," Governor Maddox intones as Spiro Agnew steps to the fore. Spiro is elegant, confident, groomed, with his hair all combed straight back tight upon his skull, so slicked down, in fact, that he emanates a mildly *squunched* sensation, like a bad forceps delivery. But on he goes to bare the good word. "Probably at no time since the War Between the States," says he, "have the people been so bitterly divided. . . ."

In the Deep South, the deliberate arousal of futile passions, hopes and all the old frayed fantasies in the hearts of ex-custodians of the white status quo amounts to calculated divisiveness in heaped proportions. What purpose is served by the bandying of racist code words like "forced busing" . . . or

by speaking of "a policy of cooperation without coercion" in the desegregation of schools . . . or of playing upon the South's latent persecution complex by the repeated reminder to Southern audiences that the Senate has "nailed a shingle to the Supreme Court door saying 'No Southerners Need Apply' "? And whose happiness is served when the President, a four-square law-and-order man, mysteriously is overcome by quailings and balkings at the mere idea of enforcing existing laws against segregation? Well, ol' Spiro up there, he knows—but he don't say nothin' (an' Br'er Fox, he lay low).

In any case, the effect of such temerity and official procrastination has always been to make all the racist ravings and endless stratagems of evasion and defiance and delay appear workable forevermore. All of which can't help but lead to the uneasy thought in uneasy Southern minds (like mine) that perhaps another name for the "ism" that attaches itself to "Nixon-Agnew" is, in the minds of many, just plain ole down-home style White Supremacy. As George Wallace puts it, "By the time my campaign slogans become clichés, other people are using them."

Officially, the demon is dissent and those who do it—a category which, by definition, would include most Negroes and practically every young white who isn't an officer in the local Jaycees.

"All we're saying is, we're legitimate people; you have to accept us and our life-style." Mike Stark is a 30-year-old ordained Baptist minister from some respectable little corner in East Texas. He is heavysset and balding. He is also hugely red-bearded, sandaled, beaded and fond of full-length robes. The ministry, he says, is his whole life, and for almost three years now, his ministry has been to the hip-types and longhairs in New Orleans' French Quarter.

Mike lives in a 200-year-old former warehouse that overlooks the Mississippi, with a communal family of 14 young folk who help him operate a full-time free clinic downstairs. The operation is supported by the Committee of Southern Churchmen and by profits from Mike's craft shop—"Stark Realities"—down on Bourbon St. A sign in the window: "RENT-A-HIPPIE. We offer for enjoyment a tour of New Orleans and/or the French Quarter with a bona fide hippie as your guide. For information and reservations, see us inside. (Soul food meal included)."

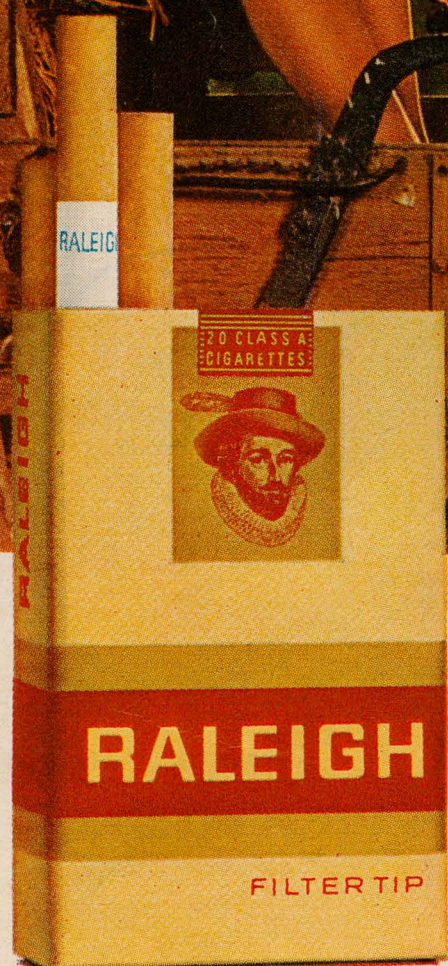
The "Easy Rider Complex" pervades in youthful circles here: the idea that you risk a certain death if you have long hair and travel the Southern byways, or even city streets. Like the blacks, they are internal aliens who, similarly, no longer take the continuation of the system for granted. "Transient children," says Mike, "are today's New Niggers."

With the present money slump, the continued



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## THE SOUTH CONTINUED

"...black people, bein' fully human, are bastards

vital tourist trade on Bourbon St. has fallen off. But the preferred scapegoats are the young folk. A local candidate campaigns on the theme: "Hippie today, Hoodlum tomorrow." They've driven off the tourists, so the story goes, because they're tasteless, offensive and unmoral.

*Bourbon St.: Dives, arcades and nudie shows; stuffed baby gators in straw hats; hard-eyed gum-chewing strippers, all silicone-injected and covered with bruises; geeks; winos; faggots; "Shiela-Miss Boobs-The Toast of 3 Continents"; brassy pitchmen; cheesy, ratty snazz; Ronky-Tonk music; and "How-a-BOUT that, folks! Le's gib li'l Tina a BIG hand..."*

Old "yaller" school bus whoofing up orange clouds of dust out in front of the house. A cross hanging on the wall, framed by a horse collar. Will D. Campbell whittles at a stick and grumbles about having withdrawal symptoms from his giving-up of chewing tobacco. He wears work clothes, boots and a hat that looks as if the hogs had tried to eat it but gave up in disgust.

Will D., 46, slumped down whittling here on his porch in Mt. Juliet, Tenn., is a Mississippi-born itinerant preacher, farmer, writer, guitar-picker as well as soul counselor to Kluxers and black militants and all other manner of riff-raff. He walked through the mobs with the first black child to enter Little Rock's Central High School in 1957, but he was never a part of the civil rights movement, as such, for he was considered too radical. He still is.

"Repression has always been here," he says, looking at his whittlings, "it's just being directed now at a little bit different groups, so people are beginning to notice it. It may be the young people today, the old people tomorrow. Whoever it is that's posing a threat to an institution.

"I think," he says, and stops whittling for a moment, "that's the mistake the liberals made in the early days of the black movement—trying to convince people like businessmen or mayors that what the Negroes wanted was, in fact, to *their* best interest. Well, you can't convince, say, a Delta planter that it's in his personal best interest to pay people \$3 an hour. It's not. He'd say, 'Weelll, you may be right but the colored folks 'round here are lazy, they're shiftless, they get into knife fights and shoot craps and get drunk Sat'day night and come to work late Monday morning.' Well, truth is that he was stating data in terms of behavior patterns correctly. But we called him a liar and said, 'No, no, no, no, Colored People are all saints and Ph.D.'s.' And we painted a picture of Ralph Bunche. Well, he laughed at us, and should have 'cause he knew it wasn't true."

The big change, says Will, came when "SNCC decided to go all black and kicked out its white liberals. It was then that these liberals began to see

for the first time that all they'd been saying just wasn't true. That black people, bein' fully human, are bastards just like the rest of us. I think it was at that point that a great many people began to discover poor whites."

What they discovered, too, was that even the Klan-type whites were part of the same stuff—the same isolations and deprivations and rejections and broken homes—as the militant blacks.

Will tells of an elderly black who worked as foreman on a Klansman's farm, lived in a practically adjoining house, and would drop over in the evenings to watch TV or drink coffee—all of which was perfectly accepted as long as it was never acknowledged as "Race Mixin'." Finally, when the black man died, he was buried beside the local Klan hall, and a 20-foot cross was burned in his honor and memory.

"This is not sayin' it's not a sick situation," Will explains, "But it is saying that those people are not apt to kill one another. It's not much to go on, but it's all we have to go on—these kinds of personal relationships in the South, which have long since disappeared in the North. I still lean toward the idea that the South has the best chance of working out its problems simply because more of us still know one another's names."

In some places, there have been actual meetings between the militants of both races, who each seem to appreciate what the other is doing. They're not necessarily pursuing the same goals but, as Will points out, "at least they're coming to understand one another. If these two groups should ever wake up to who their real class enemy is—whatever it is that keeps them a nigger and keeps them a Kluxer and keeps them poor—then, I think, you'll have a revolutionary force that will really be hard to handle."

To Preacher Will, the Christian message is for us to accept ourselves, to be reconciled and to know that we are forgiven. "I am reconciled to the man. He is my brother, I can't deny it. The solution to our racial problem is to be what we are. That's the Good News: You're free to love!"

Will D. Campbell leans back in an old hammock beneath big shade trees, with a tall bottle of beer, and looks up at the leaves moving in the wind. "Ahhh," he says and takes a sip, "this may be the answer right here. Or if it ain't, it at least dulls the question a good bit." (Pause.) "And that may be the best we can hope for anyway."

*Mississippi cropland flatness; running seas and castles of kudzu; "See Rock City"; farmers on tractors smile and flash "V" signs; "The Last Supper" in chenille; local news reports of the world's largest tadpole; mint juleps and marijuana; tracks of the Illinois Central, on which the most defeated of the Delta's black peasantry have traditionally been borne North.*



just like the rest of us."



Above, Will D. Campbell, minister to Kluxers and black militants, at home in Tenn. Left, Fannie Lou Hamer mothering a co-op in Ruleville, Miss.

"To me," she says, "the difference now 'tween the North and South is that the cats down here are racists, and they don't hide it. But even if we disagree here, we can durn sure talk."

In black minds, a valuable legacy from civil rights days is the awareness that their native region is a South neither so solid nor so hostile that it can't be transformed. From this comes a new sense of home. Says Fannie Lou: "When the man says you got to get off the plantation 'cause you voted, well, you don't want to go to Chicago and be put in a soup line. We was raised here. We was robbed of education here. And we gon' stay here an' we gon' fight for our churrun here an' we gon' make life better for ourselves an' for whites too. 'Cause no way they gon' hold us in the ditch without standin' down there with us." She laughs at this, then adds more softly, "We gon' have to work together 'cause we're the same kind of blood. I ain't got all these black-white hang-ups. I just know that when I fight for my freedom, as I liberate myself, I liberate you too."

Today, though, achieving emancipation means something other than what it meant in the South of the '60's. Then, it was sit-ins, confrontations and mass marches demanding a *desire to be* emancipated, to have the right of access. What emancipation means now is getting Negroes incorporated into the same social and economic structures from which they only recently have won the right not to be excluded. It means organized political power.

In 1940, only five percent of the South's voting-age blacks were registered. In 1950, it was 20 percent; 28 percent in 1960; and today—due to the 1965 Voting Rights Act—over 66 percent are registered. In addition, not only do voting-age blacks outnumber whites in 85 rural counties, but so many have become urbanized that they already loom as an impatient and potent

continued

Fannie Lou Hamer, 53, lives in Ruleville in Sunflower County and has seen despair or outright starvation drive 22 percent of Sunflower's blacks out of the Delta in the past decade and has sensed the mindless white denials of her dignity here and has felt the shameful pain from physical race-mad brutality, and intends to stay.

Fannie Lou is the principal organizer of Freedom Farms Cooperative, an economic self-help organization for local poor folk. "I think co-ops are the answer," she asserts. "The folks ain't gonna feed us or give us a job, so we produce the jobs for ourselves." But local whites have changed since the Movement days. "They usta have dis ole starey hate look. But they don't so much have it no mo'. I think they realize what we doin' is helpin' all of us."

She says she feels safer now in Mississippi than anywhere up North—mainly because of the national atmosphere. "This oppression and repression makes this one of the seriousest times I ever existed through. I tell you, this President of yours—I call him YO' President 'cause he damn sho' ain't none of ours—anyway, y'all's President, I wonder if he know what he's doin' or is he just confused." She shakes her head and then laughs a little. We are in her little house in Ruleville where the screen door keeps opening and slamming with ladies from the co-op.

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## ...a freshly black-and-white identity for the South itself

force for social change. The point is not that each newly registered Negro amounts to an additional faceless cipher in a vast bloc vote; rather it's that blacks are gaining sufficient political strength that Southern politicians are now obliged to start regarding them seriously as individuals. Status change is the essence of social change, and already politicians are seeing blacks in new perspective. ("It's 'bout nigh impossible to yell nigger-nigger-nigger in a race anymore," an old politico confided. "You'd just upset too many nigger voters. And you need 'em.")

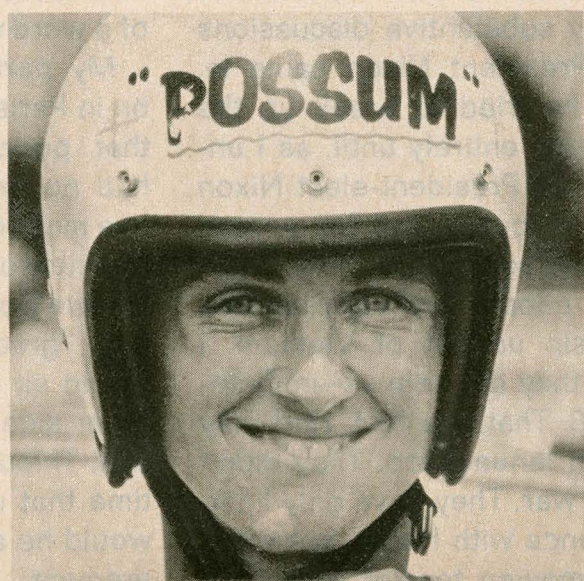
Simultaneously, whites in general, particularly among the young, have gained a new perspective, a new consciousness, about their own identity, based upon a frank assessment of who and what they'd been before.

It's as if the white Southerner took a single step back to look at his existence and is aghast. He sees himself living within the confines of a fragile official code composed of exhausted idioms, angry glories, myths and antebellum traumas, all of which compel him toward a tendency to think almost always in terms of ideology to be defended rather than actual problems to be dealt with. He sees himself practically having been bred, for his own defense, to treat even the solitary Negro as a mass abstraction, whose singular humanity is not to be acknowledged—or at least certainly not in public. And as a result of this, he sees himself, finally, as someone condemned by a whole tradition of guilt to bear a share of shame as the price of the Negroes' continued presence.

Yet there is a point at which memories and ambitions come into conflict. And pasts redeemed remain always the wrong pasts. The realization that the law is now clearly on the side of the once-hated integrationists provides him with the sense of psychic liberation he has needed as an excuse to do what he's always known deep down was right about race.

The Southern white is free. He's free from once-legal doctrines of apartheid that held himself and blacks at bay; free from the struggle with conflicting values instilled in him as a Christian, as an American and as a True Southerner; free from the strain of sustaining old myths; free from remaining in spiritual slavery to the black man. He is free, finally, to face and accept the simple existence of his own humanity with all of its limitations and potentials.

With this as a start, the white can acknowledge more clearly the Negro's shared legitimacy in the South, not as an honorary white man but on the basis of his own validity. Black and white psyches are rooted in essentially the same consciousness with the same mystical affinity for the South as home. They share the same relationship with nature, the same belief in a man's right to do what is of personal value to him



New Southern images: Blacks and whites—George "Plug" Washington and Possum—together at a dragstrip deep in rural Louisiana.

without regard to utilitarian or economic considerations, the same fabulous imaginings and sense of eternal haunting by ghosts. They each draw upon a common source of strength in their intense Christianity. And most importantly, in an increasingly fragmented, absurd, futile-seeming age, Southern blacks and whites retain an unshakable individual sense of being able to affect and transform the quality of their surroundings—and of caring enough about them to want to.

The hope is this: As Southern blacks and Southern whites become increasingly detached from past delusions and old traumas; as each explores their common landscape for a key to who he is or might become; as each probes for fresh perceptions of himself or his role or mission; as each in his own manner—infinately tender, halting and humble, radiant, somber, selfless, decrying, exalting—seeks to discover the sense of his own identity, the two may well discover at once the reality of each other. And, in the process, define not only a whole new ordering of Southern reality—but a freshly black and white identity for the South itself.

There's no millennium in the offing; just an accumulation of simple human contacts and linkages and inevitable irreversible understandings—maybe leading up someday to their mutual effort to try, thereby, in sum, somehow to mold a new order of human beings. (But that's just talk.) Maybe, though, by showing exactly what interrelation-

ships and inter-enhancements are possible among people, it may be that what is in the makings in the Southland now is some future form of social wisdom for the nation as a whole.

It begins with what we've had here all along: The utter color-blind, non-racialness of groups of Southern blacks and whites together doing little things they like in places where no one else would think to look.

Long greasy-haired good ole boys or crew-cut, flat-topped, duck-assed ("Looka that sumbitch go!"), curly, balding, frizzy, tapered sideburns ("Brroongg. . Vrrrooomm. .") slicked-down, do-ragged, parted in the middle, ("BRraazzzzzz. .") peroxided, Afro-coifed or caked with motor oil: every one of 'em a good ole boy. And they're watching, watching—in the stands, by the fence, on the grass, leaning at the hot-dog counter—every single God-lovin' good ole boy (and good ole boy's girl) is watching the twin rows of timed lights on either side of that post they call the Christmas tree up there on the starting line—watching those lights blink down, top to bottom, in hypnotic precision: blink-blink-yellow-yellow-yellow-green . . . "BRROArrrrr . . VArrooom. . ."

Young mother, father, child and line of beer cans sit high up there in the stands—come here each second and fourth weekend, they do, regular as you please, sit right in that same damn spot and ruin their ears ("WHOOORoogghh . . . WAAzummmmm. .").

Here's a humonderous-big, hyped-up cycle moving up to the line with a good ole leather-jacketed Loosianer boy all set to make it do the thing. Then a second big black-and-chrome beast comes forth with another fine Christian fellow in a black helmet plus brogans and overalls. The Christmas tree stands between them on the other side of the

line. Right off the edge of the track is the official's stand with the sign across it: LAPLACE DRAGWAY—Laplace, La. And there goes the Christmas tree, climbing down: blink-blink-yellow-yellow-yellow-green . . . smokerubber scorchin' asphalt, and there go the riders stretched out like gators, holding on the handlebars . . . "BLAhhhh . . wong (gearshift) bazoooooooo. . ."

Beside the official's stand, two black deputy sheriffs sit on stools and wait for fatalities. The tinny trumpet-speaker spouts time-trial results. And now roll out two super-cars: spindly rail-jobs, zazzed-up chrome-and-iridescent-pastel painted, fat-tired fearsome things with monster engines and good ole boys in asbestos suits and face masks tucked inside. They leap away with a terrible godless roar and black-smelling soot clouds of nitromethane fuel and burnt rubber, and whine off small into the distance.

They come here with their hot cars in tow or on trailers—fuel-injected, supercharged, gull-winged, some with drag chutes to slow them at the end of the quarter mile. Blacks and whites together, fooling with their cars, sipping Pepsis in the stands together, talking drag-strip argot—all with a perfect, elegant rawness of feeling. Amazing grace. They race the quarter-mile, then drive back slowly past the grandstand very proud, brazzing their big engines, like charioted Roman soldiers in triumph. Their names emblazoned on the doors: J.L. Goodchild, Possum, Goober LaFarge, TUFF-E-NUFF, WATWAZIT, Li'l STINKER, SUPER BEE, THE GOIN THANG. (A guy drives by the stand in a Jaguar XK-E. "Hey, take that thaing home. Hit don't b'long here.")

Comes now a jet-black Dodge with double air scoops, driven by a burly, black-shirted, black-trousered black in a black helmet. Tag on the front reads: "Black Power." He is in one of the parallel lines of cars waiting to race. Behind him sits TUFF-E-NUFF with "Wallace for Pres." stickers. Beside "Black Power" is a white Olds with gold pinstripes and a good ole boy named Possum at the wheel. "Black Power's" name is George "Plug" Washington. "I makes all the races," he says. During the week, he drives a garbage truck. If he wins a race, he gets a little metal plaque for his dashboard.

Now two dragsters pull up to the line and gun their fearsome engines. It's Plug and Possum. White Olds, Black Power. The milling crowds of good ole white boys and good ole black boys are hushed. Wait. Wait. Plug and Possum hold their brakes down hard and raaaccceee their engines, making their cars lurch up like things on haunches, ready to spring. Wait. Set. And here climbs down the Christmas tree: blink-blink-yellow-yellow-yellow-green. . Rubber-scalded stone, smoke, "Whoom. . BBBRRROO-Aarrrrrr . . Braazzzzzoooooooo. . . . ."

END