

SPLC REPORT



PUBLISHED BY THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER
TEACHING TOLERANCE • FIGHTING HATE • SEEKING JUSTICE

SPRING 2007
VOLUME 37, NUMBER 1

Citing corporate abuses, Center opposes guestworker expansion

WASHINGTON, D.C. — On the eve of congressional debate over immigration reform, the Center issued an explosive new report documenting widespread abuse of the nation's "guestworkers" and called on Congress to reject an expansion of the program that some workers describe as modern-day slavery.

President Bush and his corporate allies have urged Congress to expand the guestworker system as part of immigration reform, and legislation introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives in March calls for hundreds of thousands of new guestworkers.

"Congress should reform our broken immigration system, but reform should not rely on creating a vast new guestworker program," said Mary Bauer, director of the Center's Immigrant Justice Project and author of the report. "The current program is shamefully abusive in practice, and there is almost no enforcement of worker rights."

The Center's report — *Close to Slavery: Guestworker Programs in the United States* — was released at a March 12 press conference here and distributed to journalists and members of Congress. It received widespread media coverage throughout the nation.

The report describes in detail how guestworkers who come to the United States are routinely cheated out of wages; forced to mortgage their futures to obtain low-wage, temporary jobs; held virtually captive by employers who seize their documents; forced to live in squalid conditions; and denied medical benefits for injuries.

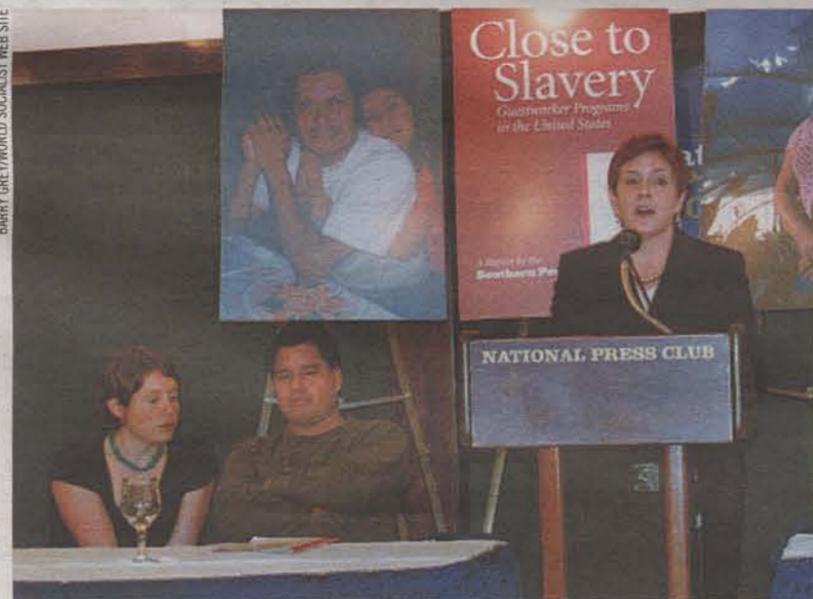
New York Times columnist Bob Herbert wrote in his March 12 column, "A must-read for anyone who favors an expansion of guest worker programs in the U.S.

is a stunning new report from the Southern Poverty Law Center that details the widespread abuse of highly vulnerable, poverty-stricken workers in programs that already exist."

The 48-page report, based on interviews with thousands of guestworkers and dozens of legal cases, describes the systematic abuse of workers under what is known as the H-2 system administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. The program was created in 1943 to allow the sugar cane industry to bring in temporary workers and was revised by Congress in 1986 to include non-agricultural workers.

Hugo Martin Recinos-Recinos, a former guestworker from Guatemala whose story is told in the report, borrowed thousands of dollars to pay recruiting fees for a forestry job in the United States. "I had to leave the deed to my home," he said. "When I got to the U.S., I was always underpaid, living in small hotel rooms and working 10-hour days. The debt from my recruitment and travel to the States made the low pay even harder to bear. When I filed a lawsuit about the conditions, my family and I were threatened."

The most fundamental problem with the H-2 system is that employers hold all the cards. They



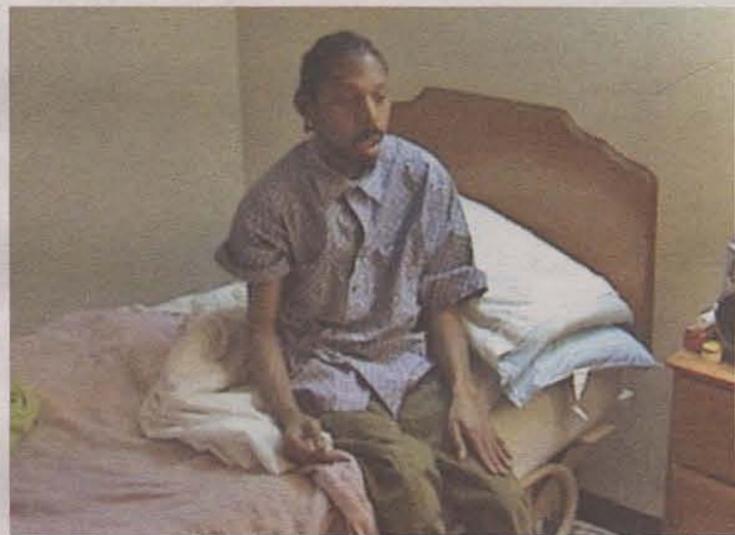
Mary Bauer (right) director of the Center's Immigrant Justice Project, announces the new report, *Close to Slavery*. Sarah Reynolds, who did much of the research for it, interpreted for former guestworker Hugo Martin Recinos-Recinos.

Employers in 2005 "imported" more than 121,000 temporary H-2 guestworkers — 32,000 for agricultural work and 89,000 for jobs in forestry, seafood processing, landscaping, construction and other non-agricultural industries.

"Guestworkers are usually poor people who are lured here by the promise of decent jobs," Bauer said. "But all too often, their dreams are based on lies, their hopes shattered by the reality of a system that treats them as commodities. They're the disposable workers of the global economy."

decide which workers can come to the United States and which cannot. They decide whether a worker can stay in this country. They usually decide where and under what conditions workers live and how they travel.

Many workers are required to pay fees ranging from \$500 to more than \$15,000 to obtain low-wage, temporary jobs in the United States. Typically, these workers incur debt that makes them unable to assert their rights for fear of financial ruin. "If guestworkers complain about abuses, (continued on page 5)



Billy Ray Johnson sits on his nursing home bed in late January.

Billy Ray Johnson case set for trial April 17

LINDEN, TEX. — Jury selection in the Center's lawsuit on behalf of Billy Ray Johnson, a mentally disabled black man who was taunted, beaten and left unconscious beside a road by a group of young white men, will begin April 13. The trial is set for April 17.

The civil lawsuit is one of the Center's most compelling cases, one with echoes of the 1999 murder of James Byrd, a black man who was dragged to his death behind a pickup truck near Jasper, Texas.

On September 28, 2003, Johnson — 42 at the time but child-like and naive — was brought to a "pasture party" to serve as the night's entertainment. Pickups were backed up to a bonfire as partygoers taunted Johnson. They got him to dance around the fire, and someone tried to get him to pick up a burning log, witnesses said.

One of the young men punched Johnson in the head and knocked him unconscious. Instead of taking Johnson to the hospital, the men put him into the back of a pickup truck and left him by the side of a remote rural road.

Johnson suffered serious brain injuries, and he'll never fully recover. The Cass County, Texas, juries that heard the criminal cases against two of the defendants, Christopher Colt Amox, who was 20 at the time of the assault, and James Cory Hicks, then 24, acquitted them of serious felony charges

and instead handed down lesser convictions, with a recommended sentence of probation only.

The two other defendants, Dallas Chadwick Stone, then 18, and John Wesley Owens, then 19, were allowed to plead guilty to an "injury to a disabled individual by omission" charge. They testified against Amox and Hicks.

A judge sentenced Owens, Stone and Amox to 30-day terms in the county jail and Hicks to 60 days.

See special insert:
"The Beating of Billy Ray Johnson,"
reprinted from *Texas Monthly*

"It's hard to think what should make your blood boil more — what happened to Billy Ray or what didn't happen to those who abused him," said Center chief trial counsel Morris Dees.

The lawsuit, filed in Cass County District Court, alleges that the defendants are liable for assault and negligence, among other things, in the case. It seeks compensatory damages.

Johnson, who had no criminal background, history of violence or trouble of any kind, lived with his mother and brother before the assault. Now he lives in a Texarkana nursing home with permanent brain damage. He tells visitors that he wants to go home, but that's not possible without costly special assistance.

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The Southern Poverty Law Center is a nonprofit organization that combats hate, intolerance, and discrimination through education and litigation. Its programs include Teaching Tolerance and the Intelligence Project. The Center also sponsors the Civil Rights Memorial, which celebrates the memory of individuals who died during the Civil Rights Movement, and the Civil Rights Memorial Center.

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A MESSAGE FROM CENTER PRESIDENT RICHARD COHEN

'We must turn every stone to seek justice for martyrs'

Emmett Till was just a boy of 14 when he traveled to Mississippi from his home in Chicago in 1955. Not understanding the mores of the segregated South, he made the terrible mistake of whistling at a white woman.

Southern "justice" was swift. That weekend, Till was taken away by white men. His body was found three days later, weighted and dumped in the Tallahatchie River. A bullet was lodged in his skull. One eye was gouged out, and one side of his head was crushed.

His mother, Mamie Till, waited for justice that never came. Two white men were acquitted at the time, and just last month a grand jury declined to indict anyone else, closing the books on the case.

But her son's murder galvanized the Civil Rights Movement. Ms. Till insisted that the casket be open at the funeral, so the world could see Emmett's mutilated body and so that America would be forced to confront the horror and brutality of the racial violence that plagued the South. She hoped her son's death would help put an end to the unspeakable injustices that many other mothers endured.

I knew Ms. Till. Before she

died, she spoke at the 1989 dedication of the Civil Rights Memorial built by the Center at our headquarters in Montgomery, Ala. Today, water flows continuously over the round granite table that contains the inscription of her son's name, along with 39 other martyrs of the Civil Rights Movement.

The fact that no one may ever be punished for her son's death would not have surprised her. It would have only strengthened

We must remember that these were not just murder cases. These were cases in which the criminal justice system failed.

her commitment to justice for the other victims.

And it should strengthen our resolve to demand justice for them, as well.

Now the FBI is renewing its



Richard Cohen

efforts to look into the unresolved cases from that era. To aid that initiative, we have forwarded to the FBI information about 75 people who died between 1952 and 1968 under circumstances suggesting they may have been victims of racially moti-

ated violence. Some of the crimes will never be solved. But we should ensure that every lead is followed.

The problem all along has been the assumption that these

murder cases are "cold." For years, that assumption was allowed to become a self-fulfilling prophecy, an excuse for inaction. Because justice has been delayed for so long as a result, it is more

difficult and expensive, of course, to achieve justice now than if these cases had been properly pursued from the start.

Some would argue that the difficulty and expense – something brought about by our failure to pursue justice vigorously in the past – should be reason enough to forget about pursuing justice today. This argument, of course, is perverse. Human life is priceless. That's why there is no statute of limitations on murder.

Yes, it is important to set priorities in law enforcement. But we must remember that these were not just murder cases. These were cases in which the criminal justice system failed. Prosecuting them now not only brings closure to the families but also vindicates the justice system itself.

Martin Luther King Jr. was fond of saying that though the arc of the moral universe may be long, it bends toward justice. Before our nation closes the books on the civil rights era, we should turn over every stone to seek justice for the martyrs of the movement. For every case where justice is finally achieved, there are 10 for which it will never happen. Justice in one case will have to serve as a symbol for many others.

MAILBOX

I am not a "teacher" per se, but a psycho-therapist who is employed by the Lee County Youth Development Center, working with "at risk" children who are referred from counties around the state. I brought your generous offer of free resources on teaching tolerance to the attention of my supervisor, and this week a "great bounty" of resources arrived in our office!

I cannot begin to tell you how a small group of passionate, committed and sometimes burnt-out therapists appreciate this "gift!" We are now working on ways in which we can best utilize and maximize the wonderful resources we now have, to ensure that every child we provide services for is reached and can grow in ways that are so neglected and undervalued in the USA.

The Zulu concept of "uBuntu," humanity and tolerance, is only possible through our relationship with other humans, and children are the carriers of this uBuntu/humanity. Thank you for everything you are doing to facilitate this value.

M. M.
Auburn, Alabama

As both a law enforcement officer and a university professor, I appreciate all the work the Center is doing. The *Intelligence Report* is super. Look forward to each and every issue. I work gangs and other such groups all over the U.S. and I have much appreciation for your organization's efforts. Thanks!

J. P.
Conway, Arkansas

Thank you so much for the free curriculum *Rhinos and Raspberries* you sent me. I am a school counselor at a K-4 school, and I have

used the stories in each grade, incorporating the fables with literacy and cooperative-activity lessons. I spent 90 minutes in various classes, and the students loved the stories and the tie-in with life lessons and values.

It is going to take me a month to accommodate the many requests I've had from teachers to teach these lessons in their classrooms. Thank you so much for providing these free materials. Our budget is tight, and without your support, this would not have been possible.

J. D.
Windham, New Hampshire

Keep up the great work! You do outstanding things in every good way because people do outstanding things in bad ways! We need more folks like your group. Thanks for making my life better. As a lesbian, I know that hatred is out there; my gift is to live an open life to maybe change some thinking. Overall, your work effects change on a grand scale – as it should be. Thanks again.

L. M.
Stratford, Connecticut

I just received your mailing regarding the case of Billy Ray Johnson in Linden, Tex. I want to say how proud I am to be a supporter of the Center and the work that Morris Dees and other Center employees do. Thank you for taking on the case of Billy Ray Johnson, a man I have never heard of. I will pass on the information to my friends and family so they can know about this case, the community's response and your work with it.

A. B.
Bloomington, Indiana

Teaching Tolerance has turned out to be one of the most invaluable resources I've found.

M. G.
Florence, South Carolina

Thank you for spearheading the work on the exploitation of guestworkers. It needs to come to the attention of more Americans, and having your work picked up by *The New York Times* does just that! I am proud to be a supporter of what you do, and I am so grateful for your mind, your energy and your wisdom.

R. Y.
Bradford, Vermont

I go to Century College. [See related story on page 8.] On Jan. 24, Morris Dees came here and gave a wonderful and inspiring speech. What this organization is doing is amazing. Thank you all for being so courageous and loving. You are all doing a wonderful job.

L. J. F.
White Bear Lake, Minnesota

I am a student teacher and was looking for a way to teach my students about Rosa Parks and the Civil Rights Movement. I found a copy of *Mighty Times: The Legacy of Rosa Parks*. I showed this video to my class. I have never seen these students so mesmerized by something. It is an excellent film and it really helped my students understand that time period.

Thank you for the wonderful and insightful things you do with teaching tolerance. In a place like Utah, where there isn't that much racism from hate, but from ignorance, it helps to spread a little knowledge.

D. L.
Lehi, Utah

New report documents anti-Semitic sect

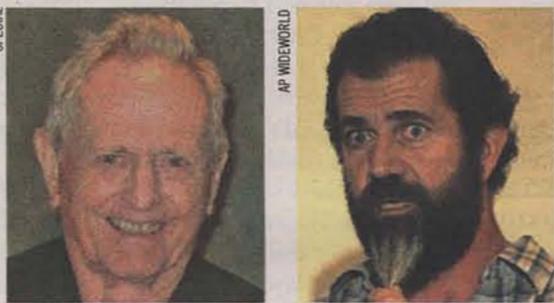
In January, the Center's Intelligence Project released a report, "The New Crusaders," on the anti-Semitic "radical traditionalist" Catholic movement.

Not affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, the radical traditionalist movement, which rejects many Vatican edicts and in some cases does not even believe that Pope Benedict XVI is a valid pope, is shot through with anti-Semitism. Mel Gibson, who went on an anti-Semitic tirade this past summer after being pulled over for drunk driving, as well as his Holocaust-denying father, Hutton Gibson, are both members of this renegade Catholic movement.

The Intelligence Project's three-year investigation of this subculture found that these Catholic extremists may well represent the largest population of anti-Semites in the United States. Organized into more than a dozen organizations that the Center now designates as hate groups, radical traditionalists in the U.S. are preaching anti-Semitism to as many as 100,000 followers.

The radicals' understanding of what has gone wrong with the world boils down to a few basic things. They believe that most of the theological developments within the church since the Vati-

can II reforms were passed in the 1960s have been egregiously wrong, especially with regard to reconciling with Jews and the followers of other faiths. And they lament the phasing out of the Latin Mass and argue that the new Mass, preached in local dialects, does not guarantee salva-



Movie star Mel Gibson (right) and his father, Hutton Gibson, are members of a renegade anti-Semitic Catholic movement.

tion. (Radical traditionalists have almost nothing in common with traditionalist Catholics, who attend Latin Masses and support the Vatican).

An international movement, radical traditionalism is growing and spreading its anti-Semitic teachings. Some of the most extreme of the radical traditionalists are increasingly interacting with neo-Nazis and their fellow travelers. For example, John Sharpe, head of the anti-Semitic hate group Legion of St. Louis, attended the 2006 conference of *American Renaissance*, a racist publication that specializes in race and intelligence. That same year, Father

Nicholas Gruner, leader of the International Fatima Rosary Crusade, attended a conference of *The Barnes Review*, a Holocaust-denial journal.

At a conference put on in Philadelphia by the hate group *Catholic Family News*, anti-Semitism was rife. Radical traditionalists hold several conferences a year where anti-Semitism is preached and anti-Semitic tracts, such as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, are sold. The Philadelphia participants spent much of their time describing elaborate anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, in particular one

that dwelled on the perils of a much-feared "Judeo-Masonic" plot. As preached that day, the alleged conspiracy involves ancient, shadowy fraternities such as the Masons, who are seen as puppets in a Jewish master plan aimed at destroying the Catholic Church.

For the vast majority of Catholics, the existence of this anti-Semitic subculture is highly distressing. The church has worked extraordinarily hard in recent decades to distance itself from anti-Semitic teachings and the idea of forcing its view of the world on unbelievers. Many Jewish and organizations from other faiths have applauded these efforts.

Hate group numbers continue increase

Energized by the rancorous national debate on immigration and increasingly successful at penetrating mainstream political discourse, hate groups in America continued to grow in number in 2006, rising 5 percent over the year before to 844 groups.

That increase translates into a 40 percent jump in the number of groups since 2000, when there were 602 hate groups operating in America, according to research by the Center's Intelligence Project. Much of the expansion has been driven by hate groups' exploitation of the issue of illegal immigration, which many Americans see as a pressing concern.

Last year's hate group growth came despite continuing disarray on the neo-Nazi scene, with various relatively weak groups vying for dominance; a series of embarrassments, including the arrests of two key leaders; the deaths of many stalwarts of the white supremacist old guard; signs of a splintering skinhead alliance; and the absence of any single major group working to unify the others.

At the same time that hate groups continued to proliferate, the United States has seen the breathtakingly rapid rise of a right-wing anti-immigration movement made up of groups

that are xenophobic but mostly stop short of the open racial hatred espoused by hate groups. In just the past two years, some 250 new nativist organizations have sprung up, some of them armed and engaged in vigilante round-ups of unauthorized Latino immigrants. More and more of them have taken up the tactics of personal, in-your-face intimidation.

Anti-immigrant sentiment grows

Most of these anti-immigration groups routinely denigrate unauthorized Latino immigrants and also popularize conspiracy theories that originate in hate groups, such as an alleged Mexican plot to annex the American Southwest. As a result, it is no longer uncommon for these ideas and theories to make their way to radio, television or other mainstream venues. Even U.S. congressmen now bandy about unsubstantiated accusations of immigrant criminality, helping to whip up an atmosphere in which immigrants are seen as personally threatening.

"This kind of really vile propaganda begins in hate groups, makes its way out into the larger anti-immigration movement, and, before you know it, winds up in places like 'Lou Dobbs Tonight'

on CNN," said Mark Potok, director of the Intelligence Project. "This country needs a robust debate on immigration, but it does not need a debate based on racist allegations and bogus conspiracy theories."

Although the anti-immigration movement has endured several recent splits, it appears to be growing more radical overall, particularly since its supporters on the right wing of the Republican Party have grown increasingly isolated and weak as the GOP suffers from election losses and an unpopular war. That radicalization was reflected in a recent comment from Chris Simcox, a co-founder of the Minuteman Project who had been a relatively moderate voice in the nativist movement.

"Be prepared and stock up on survival supplies, you may well need them," Simcox warned movement colleagues in an e-mail early this year, as immigration legislation that could expand the guest worker program advanced. "I'm not advocating it, nor am I claiming I will participate, however, the fact remains, hundreds of thousands of Americans will consider this the final straw, violent civil disobedience will break out all over the country if this legislation gets passed."

Intelligence Briefs

tracking extremist activity

Holocaust denier attacks Nobel laureate

SAN FRANCISCO — Famous author and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel was attacked by a Holocaust denier who had evidently been shadowing Wiesel for weeks before accosting him Feb. 1 in a hotel elevator here, where Wiesel had just finished speaking at a peace conference.

According to police reports, Eric Hunt, 22, of Sussex County, N.J., dragged Wiesel from the elevator, while demanding that Wiesel admit the Holocaust a myth, and then fled when Wiesel cried for help.

Hunt later posted an account of the assault on several white supremacist and anti-Semitic websites.

Wiesel, 78, survived the Nazi death camps at Auschwitz and Buchenwald during World War II, and has since written more than 40 books. He is best known for his memoir, "Night," about his experiences at Auschwitz. Wiesel won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986.

Hunt was arrested Feb. 17 in New Jersey, and later extradited to San Francisco on charges of attempted kidnapping, battery, stalking, elder abuse and commission of a hate crime.

White supremacists distribute fliers

BOULDER — Members of the Nationalist Coalition, a white supremacist hate group, distributed "Love Your Race" fliers around Valentine's Day in Lafayette, Colo. The fliers, which were placed on windshields and thrown in driveways, depict a blonde woman below the motto "Love Your Race," along with the Nationalist Coalition's website address and a phone number.

The Nationalist Coalition is based in St. Petersburg, Fla.

The phone number on fliers connects callers to a recorded message describing the Nationalist Coalition as "the foremost organization working for the long-term interests of white Americans."

The hate group's website invites users to take the Nationalist Coalition's "how anti-Semitic are you quiz," which includes questions like, "Generally speaking, the Jews are physically attractive. Yes, No, or Not Sure?"

The website also offers other fliers for users to download free of charge. One declares: "Non-whites are turning America into a third world slum. They come for welfare or to take our jobs. They bring crime. Let's send them home now!" Another flier is titled, "Anne Frank Hoax Exposed," with the subtitle, "Clever Jew made millions from dead daughter."

Sgt. Fred Palmer of the Lafayette Police Department said the fliers are protected free speech.

Lawmakers threatened by extremists

PHOENIX — Two Arizona lawmakers announced they have received death threats from anti-immigration extremists.

Rep. Bill Konopnicki, a Republican who represents Saford, Ariz., said he and his family were threatened in e-mails and an anonymous letter after he was quoted in newspapers urging his colleagues to show restraint in considering new laws that would penalize small business owners for hiring undocumented immigrants.

"I never thought that I would fear for my safety or the safety of my family when I took a seat in the Arizona House of Representatives," he said during an emotional speech on the floor of the House Feb. 20. "None of us should fear for our safety or of those we love."

Konopnicki cited a "poisonous atmosphere" surrounding the immigration debate, but vowed he would not be intimidated. "We need to vote our conscience," he said.

One month earlier, Rep. Kyrsten Sinema (D-Phoenix) said that she had received several death threats and threats of rape after she introduced a bill that would criminalize armed vigilante border patrols.

"I am not unwilling as a public figure to tackle issues that are controversial and unpopular, but I did not expect this," Sinema told *The Arizona Republic*.

Neo-Nazi sentenced for nerve gas plot

JACKSON, TENN. — Longtime neo-Nazi Demetrius Van Crocker was sentenced to 30 years in prison in December for plotting to detonate a sarin nerve gas and C-4 plastic explosive "suitcase bomb" in the U.S. Capitol building.

Crocker was arrested in 2004 after meeting several times with an undercover FBI agent posing as a domestic terrorist employed at the Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas. Crocker arranged for the agent to deliver explosives and a water-filled container marked "Sarin" that Crocker believed to contain nerve gas.

A jury in federal court here convicted Crocker last April. During the trial, prosecutors played several hours of secretly recorded conversations in which, as the *Memphis Flyer* described in its coverage of the trial, "Crocker poured out his racial hatred, his loathing of the government, his obsession with chemical and conventional weapons, his admiration for Timothy McVeigh (who blew up the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995), and a chilling familiarity with basic chemistry."



Jarred Hensley poses in his Klan garb in a website photo.

Center sues Klansmen for beating of youth

BRANDENBERG, KEN. — The Center filed suit Feb. 22 against two Klansmen who savagely beat a teenage boy at a carnival here last July.

The lawsuit defendants - Jarred Hensley, 24, of Cincinnati and Andrew Watkins, 26, of Louisville - are members of the Imperial Klans of America, the nation's largest Klan group at the time of the assault. In separate legal action, they were each sentenced to three years after pleading guilty to second-degree assault.

The Klansmen targeted the 16-year-old boy, whose father is a Kuna Indian from Panama, because they thought he was Hispanic. They beat, kicked and spit on him during the attack, which occurred shortly after midnight at the Meade County Fairgrounds. They also shouted racial epithets, calling him a "spic."

The teenager suffered two cracked ribs, a broken left fore-

arm, multiple cuts and bruises, and jaw injuries that required extensive dental repair. Traumatized by the beating, he is seeking mental health treatment.

The Klansmen were arrested at the scene and initially charged with disorderly conduct and alcohol intoxication in a public place. On Aug. 10, Hensley and Watkins appeared in court and were arrested on assault charges. Hensley was wearing the same steel-toed black boots with red laces that he wore during the assault.

A Meade County grand jury on Sept. 11 indicted the men on second-degree assault as a hate crime, alcohol intoxication in a public place and disorderly conduct. They have remained in jail since their arrest.

The Center's lawsuit, filed in Meade County Circuit Court, seeks both compensatory and punitive damages.



Andrew Watkins



Center donor invited to trial

Morris Dees poses with Dallas lawyer Chandra Vick during her visit Feb. 27. Dees invited Vick, a Center donor since 1989, to attend the trial in the Billy Ray Johnson case, set for April 17 in Linden, Texas, northeast of Dallas.

Center prompts expanded FBI initiative

The Center was instrumental recently in a decision by the U.S. Justice Department to re-examine many of the unsolved murders from the civil rights era.

The Justice Department's Feb. 27 announcement of the initiative came a few days after the Center provided the FBI with information about the deaths of dozens of people who may have been victims of racially motivated killings.

Center President Richard Cohen was invited to appear at a Washington, D.C., press conference with Department of Justice officials and representatives from the NAACP and the National Urban League to discuss the initiative.

"There are murder cases from the civil rights era that still cry out for justice, cases that cry out for further investigation," Cohen told reporters. "Now, with today's announcement, there is renewed hope that these cries will be answered." (See commentary on page 2.)

The names forwarded to the FBI were gathered from research done for the Civil Rights Memorial. The names of 40 people who met certain criteria were inscribed on the Memorial's timeline. Dozens of others could not be included because there was not enough information known about the circumstances of their deaths. Their names are displayed on a wall in

the Civil Rights Memorial Center.

"Those responsible for these forgotten deaths — those who may still be alive today, like James Ford Seale, who was recently arrested for the murders of Henry Hezekiah Dee and Charles Eddie Moore — have gone unpunished too long," Cohen said in a letter accompanying the list of 75 names.

The list of 75 names sent to the FBI is alphabetical and includes the time and place of each death and a brief description of what happened.

"We suspect that some were killed by white supremacists to intimidate the black community or to thwart the Civil Rights Movement," Cohen said.

Memorial plays role in unsolved murders

Research conducted in connection with the Civil Rights Memorial has played a key role in the reopening of unsolved civil rights era murders, including the recent indictment of James Ford Seale in Mississippi.

When the Southern Poverty Law Center was planning for the Memorial, its research staff searched long-forgotten files at a number of sites in an effort to determine who should be listed as martyrs on the Memorial's granite timeline. When the 40 were selected, the Center published a book, *Free At Last*, that tells their stories. It was distributed in concert with the Memorial's dedication and was updated in 2004.

The book became a valuable tool for journalist Jerry Mitchell of *The [Jackson, Miss.] Clarion-Ledger*. He has unearthed documents, cajoled suspects and witnesses and pursued evidence in the notorious killings from that era. "*Free at Last* became my road map on my journey into reinvestigating these cases, starting with the 1963 assassination of Mississippi NAACP leader Medger Evers," he said.

"The Memorial stands as a reminder that the martyrs' killers walked free, even though everyone knew they were guilty," Mitchell said. "After it was dedicated in 1989, it transformed into an instrument of justice."

The Memorial and the book helped ensure that the martyrs were never forgotten, he said. The Memorial is situated across the street from the Center's headquarters in Montgomery, Ala.

In early 1989, Mitchell attended a special press screening of the film *Mississippi Burning*, a fictionalized account of the three civil rights workers

murdered in Neshoba County in 1964. Also at the screening were two FBI agents who had opened a Mississippi office during a search for the three workers. The film and his conversation with the agents afterwards piqued Mitchell's interest in unsolved civil rights murders and prompted his quest to bring unpunished killers to justice.

of prestigious awards for his reporting, including the 2005 John Chancellor Award for Excellence in Journalism.

"For too long, people thought that nothing could be done about those who had literally gotten away with murder during the civil rights era," Cohen said. "But as we've seen in recent years, with the successful prosecutions of



Visitors read the names of martyrs inscribed on the Civil Rights Memorial in downtown Montgomery, Ala.

Mitchell's reporting resulted in the 1994 conviction of Byron de la Beckwith for the Evers killing; the 1998 conviction of Imperial Wizard Sam Bowers for the death of Vernon Dahmer; the 2003 conviction of Ernest Avants for killing caretaker Ben Chester White; and the conviction of Edgar Ray Killen for helping orchestrate the Neshoba County murders. His stories also contributed to the investigation that led to Seale's indictment.

"It has not been an easy journey," Mitchell said. "There were many people who wanted me to stop, including friends, family and fellow journalists."

Since 1989, authorities in seven states have re-examined 29 killings from the civil rights era and made 28 arrests - including Seale's - and obtained 22 convictions. Mitchell has won a number

murderers like Edgar Ray Killen, Dr. King was right when he said that the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice. It's our hope that investigators will continue to prove the point."

Legislation that would give the Department of Justice and the FBI the ability to reopen civil rights era criminal cases that have gone cold was reintroduced in Congress on Feb. 8. The Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act is named for the teenager who was murdered while on a summer vacation in Money, Miss., in 1955. Public outrage surrounding the case helped spur the modern-day Civil Rights Movement.

The proposed legislation, originally introduced last year, is co-sponsored by Sens. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) and Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Reps. John Lewis (D-Ga.) and Kenny Hulshof (R-Mo.).



Congressional delegation visits Civil Rights Memorial

Congressman John Lewis (D-Ga.) points to a list of "forgotten" — dozens of slain people from the civil rights era whose deaths likely were racially motivated — displayed in the Civil Rights Memorial Center. Lewis, accompanied by Center President Richard Cohen, visited the Center after leading a congressional delegation to a wreath-laying ceremony at the Memorial on March 3.

Grant teaches students about Holocaust

MOUNT AIRY, N.C. — When she learned that some of her students were hiding their Jewish identity because they feared being bullied, Linda Myers knew she had to address the problem.

"There wasn't just one incident, there were several of them," said Myers, "We had a teacher who abandoned a course of study because some students were making fun of their peers."

When she realized the extent of the problem, Myers, who teaches more than 60 students at J.J. Jones Intermediate School here, went home and wrote an application for a Teaching Tolerance grant. Her idea for the project was to use different picture-based texts to address growing up in an environment

used books about the Holocaust. Myers' students looked through the books, which included *Tell Them We Remember*, *Star of Hope*, *The Harmonica*, *The Cats in Krasinski Square*, *Four Perfect Pebbles*, on their own. The students then read one of three novels about the Holocaust: *Number the Stars*, *The Devil's Arithmetic* and *Daniel's Story*.

Myers says she chose the picture books because she believed they would help her students identify with victims of the Holocaust, without frightening them. Over the course of a week, the students read the picture books and watched the movie *Six Million Paperclips*. All along, Myers introduced ideas of propaganda, bias and intolerance.

"We talked about the stereo-

They looked at their own books critically and compared them to other reading they have done on the Holocaust. They were then encouraged to offer their own opinions on whether the books present an unbiased view of the Holocaust.

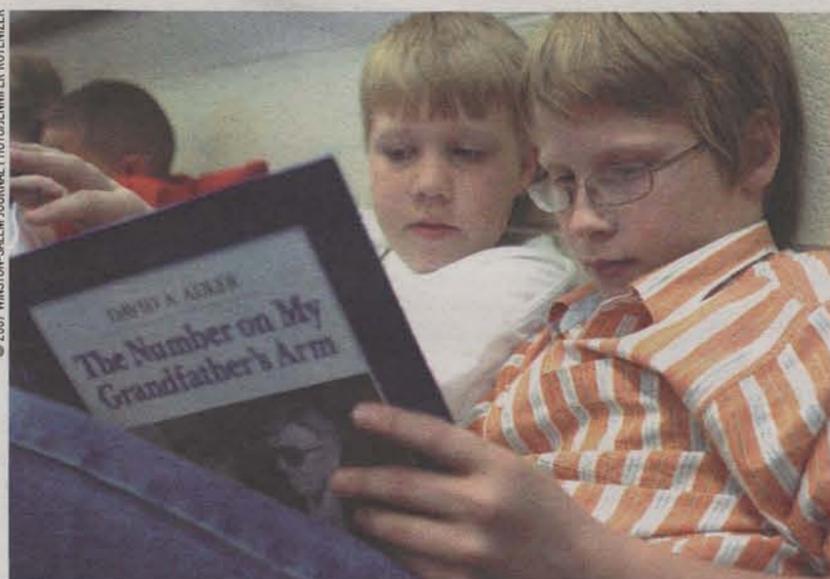
In addition to the Holocaust, Myers' unit covered the Civil Rights Movement and ended with the terrorist attacks of September 11.

"If you look at it, the lesson of the Civil Rights Movement is the lesson of the Holocaust is the lesson of 9/11," she said. "In education, we are the teachers of good citizenship. All of those are examples in history where citizenship failed."

Teaching Tolerance grants administrator Rhonda Thomason said Myers' project exemplifies the kind of work the Center aims to support through its Teaching Tolerance grants.

"Linda Meyers' grant project is a fine example of the kind of program that we hope to see implemented in classrooms across the country," Thomason said. "Her comprehensive literacy project actively involves students in dialogue about religious tolerance and immigration acceptance and helps break down barriers. Her project models tolerance education that can make a difference in every classroom and in every school."

Since its inception in 1997, the Teaching Tolerance grants program has awarded more than 1,000 grants — totaling more than \$1 million — to educators nationwide. The money supports a wide variety of innovative, student-centered projects that promote tolerance and respect.



Blake Hensley (left) and Phillip Whitt, 5th graders at Jones Intermediate School, learn about the Holocaust from a book provided through a Teaching Tolerance grant.

where not everyone shared the same religious beliefs.

"I always knew that if 3rd and 4th graders are teasing someone about their religion, it's because they don't understand," Myers said.

Myers received a \$500 grant from Teaching Tolerance which she used to purchase 40 new and

types the students have encountered and heard, and we discussed the impact that stereotypes and propaganda have," Myers said. "The idea was to make them less nervous when talking about these issues."

One way the students looked at propaganda and bias was by examining their own textbooks.

Center to release resource for parents

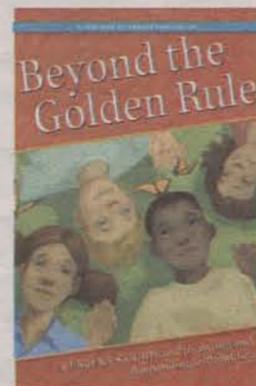
For more than 15 years, Teaching Tolerance has helped educators nationwide reach our nation's young people with lessons of respect and understanding. This spring, the project will extend its support to children's first teachers: parents.

A new guidebook, *Beyond the Golden Rule: A Parent's Guide to Preventing and Responding to Prejudice*, offers practical advice for caregivers of children in three age groups: the preschool years (ages 2-5), the elementary and preteen years (ages 6-12) and the teen years (ages 13-17.)

"For several years, we've offered tips for parents online and in *Teaching Tolerance* magazine," said project director Jennifer Holladay. "This guidebook represents a more formidable commitment to helping parents, grandparents and guardians nurture appre-

ciation for human differences among our nation's next generation of leaders."

Beyond the Golden Rule already is receiving praise from parenting experts across the country.



New guide offers advice to parents.

"Dividing the guidebook by developmental level, using such varied and fine examples from so many families nationwide, using the wisdom of the experts and concluding with specific tips makes for a comprehensive and easily readable volume," said Dr. Kerby T. Alvy, the founder and executive director of the Center for the Improvement of Child Caring in Studio City, Calif. "*Beyond the Golden Rule* should become basic reading for all parents."

Beyond the Golden Rule will be available for free online at www.tolerance.org/parents; print copies will be made available at cost to children's caregivers nationwide.



College students 'Mix It Up'

Teaching Tolerance's national celebration, *Mix It Up at Lunch Day*, breaks down barriers between students of all ages. Tatiana Campbell (right), greets fellow Palm Beach Community College student Jheneal Nelson during lunch at the Lake Worth, Fla., school. This year's *Mix Day* is set for Nov. 13.

New Center report documents widespread guestworker abuse

(continued from page 1) they face deportation, blacklisting or other retaliation," the report says.

"Guestworkers don't enjoy the most basic protections of a free labor market — the ability to change jobs if they are cheated or abused by their employer," Bauer said.

The rights that H-2 workers do have exist mostly on paper. The federal government has failed to protect them from unscrupulous employers, and most cannot obtain private legal assistance to enforce their rights through the courts.

The report concludes that the H-2 guestworker program should not serve as a model for immigration reform, but in fact

should be overhauled if allowed to continue. It offers specific recommendations to remedy the worst abuses.

"The mistreatment of temporary foreign workers in America today is one of the major civil rights issues of our time," Center President Richard Cohen said. "For too long, we've reaped the economic benefits of their labor but have ignored the incredible degree of abuse and exploitation they endure. Congress now has an opportunity to right this terrible wrong. Congress should eliminate the current H-2 system entirely or commit to making it a fair program with strong worker protections that are vigorously enforced."

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Center remembers Partner for the Future

The founder of a tremendously successful business, Ed Broida was able to retire early and spend the second half of his life pursuing his true passions.

A Cleveland native, Broida founded R & B Development Co. in 1962 and retired just 10 years later. He created one of this country's premier private art collections. He became a generous philanthropist, donating a substantial portion of his collection to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City and becoming one of the Center's Partners for the Future.



Ed Broida

Partners are special donors who include the Center in their wills or estate plans, thereby extending their support for the Center's work beyond their lifetimes. Broida's support of the Center reflects a commitment to issues he dealt with his entire life.

"He was always against all sorts of prejudice and racism," said his wife, Gisele Broida. "As a Jewish kid, he felt a lot of prejudice growing up, and it gave him an awareness of discrimination and racism."

In 1974, the year Ed turned 40, he began devoting much of his retirement to renewing an early interest in art and began frequenting art galleries and artists' studios in Los Angeles and New York. He purchased his first three paintings, created by Philip Guston, in 1978, which grew into a collection of over 800 works by a varied group of artists.

In 2005 Broida contacted MoMA, and offered the museum its choice of pieces, except for a

few special items that he wanted to keep for his children. In October, the museum announced Broida's gift of 174 contemporary works by 38 artists.

The museum hosted an exhibit of Broida's collection, "Against the Grain: Contemporary Art from the Edward R. Broida Collection," in 2006. Eric Broida, his son, said of the exhibit: "It was very emotional and raw. It represented the heart and soul of Dad's collection and to have had the opportunity to have seen it together in one place was very moving."

In addition to playing a role in the future of the Center's work, Broida made a lasting contribution to both the art world and more importantly to his family. "You couldn't have asked for a better father," Eric Broida said. "I honestly don't believe there is another person in the world that has treated me personally with absolute unconditional love. That has taught me something profound and that is very deeply missed."

Ed also taught his children another important value. "With respect to Dad's feelings against any form whatsoever of discrimination or racism, that was drilled into my head growing up, and I feel exactly the same," Eric Broida said. "Dad would talk to me every year about the SPLC, and the reason he was so passionate about you is for the very reason of your existence, that you fight discrimination and are committed to racial equality. Dad was very passionate about that fight, and I am too."

Scroll of Remembrance

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Civil Rights Memorial

Sexually harassed Florida farmworkers get justice

One of Florida's largest fruit and vegetable wholesalers has agreed to pay \$215,000 to settle allegations of sexual harassment in one of the few such lawsuits ever brought on behalf of farmworker women in the United States.

The lawsuit, initiated by Southern Poverty Law Center attorney Mónica Ramírez Guerrero, alleged five Haitian women working at Gargiulo Inc.'s tomato packinghouse in Immokalee were subjected to repeated, unwelcome sexual advances by their supervisor and then faced retali-

ation after they complained. The retaliation included the firing of three of the women.

"While they were being harassed they did not know that laws existed to protect them," said Ramírez Guerrero. "Due to the fact that they are immigrants and farmworkers, our clients thought it would be impossible to achieve justice. They believe that this settlement will help other women who are experiencing sexual harassment, so that they do not feel helpless."

The consent decree, the result of lawsuits brought by the U.S.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Center, Florida Legal Services and the Fort Myers law firm Webb, Scarmozzino & Gunter, was signed on Jan. 21 by U.S. District Judge John E. Steele in Fort Myers.

The EEOC has identified several other, unnamed women who were also harassed, and they will each receive a share of the settlement.

Retaliation followed rejected advances

The lawsuit alleged that from the fall of 2003 until the spring of 2004, the women endured

repeated requests for sex, offensive sexual remarks and physical contact with their bodies. The women, who worked as tomato graders, said they rejected the supervisor's advances and suffered retaliation as a result. They were suspended without pay, subjected to adverse working conditions and either fired or not rehired for a new packing season. Despite complaints to Gargiulo officials, the company took no action on the women's behalf.

The case was filed in September 2005 by the EEOC, alleging

violation of the federal Civil Rights Act, which prohibits sex discrimination in the workplace. Several months later, the Center intervened in the action on behalf of the women, adding a claim of sexual harassment and retaliation under the Florida Civil Rights Act.

Although the company denied responsibility for any wrongdoing, the parties reached an amicable settlement before trial.

In addition to the monetary settlement, Gargiulo, based in Naples, agreed to adopt a written policy against sexual harassment and retaliation by the end of February that includes a reporting procedure to provide Haitian and Latino employees with a Creole and Spanish language interpreter. The company must provide a copy of the policy to all employees and managers in both its Immokalee and Naples packinghouses.

Gargiulo also agreed to train all of its employees at both plants about the new policy. A two-hour annual training for both plants' managers and supervisory personnel will focus specifically on recognizing harassment and retaliatory acts.

"The injunctive relief in this case is particularly important, given that migrant farmworker women and other low-wage immigrant workers often know little or nothing about their rights in the face of sexual harassment," said Ramírez Guerrero. "In addition, even though sexual harassment is believed to be a frequent problem faced by farmworker women, few know where to report it, and they fear they will be retaliated against for making a complaint."

New handbook to aid female farmworkers

Norma Douglas knew the working conditions on the tomato farm in Florida would be less than ideal, but she never expected her new employer to lock her up at night.

But that's exactly what Douglas said the company did to her and the other women who traveled by bus from Hidalgo, Mexico, to the United States to work on the farm to earn money to send back to their families. Over the course of a week, the workers were allowed two hours — one on Saturday and one on Sunday — in which they could leave the company's premises.

Douglas' story is not unique, but it's seldom told. By some estimates, there are up to 4 million low-wage immigrant women toiling at difficult jobs in the United States. Many report some form of on-the-job abuse. Ten came forward to tell their story in *Voices for Justice*, a new handbook distributed free of charge by Espe-

ranza, the immigrant women's legal initiative of the Southern Poverty Law Center.

"Low-wage immigrant women are among the most vulnerable workers in our country because of their gender, their economic reality, their status as immigrants and their unfamiliarity with the law," said Monica Ramirez Guerrero, who directs Esperanza, which means "hope" in Spanish. "This makes it easy for other people to prey upon and exploit them."

The new handbook educates low-wage immigrant women about their rights in the workplace and the steps they should take if they are confronted with harassment or discrimination. Often they are unfamiliar with their rights in the United States, the legal system and the procedures related to asserting their rights, Guerrero said.

"These women are often victims of economic and sexual exploitation," Guerrero said. "They

are frequently the first to be fired or laid off. They are not paid equally to their male counterparts, and they are sometimes not paid at all. In addition, they face sexual violence in the workplace at alarming rates."

While there are no national data to suggest the true number of low-wage immigrant women who face sexual violence or harassment, in one survey 90 percent of farmworker women in California reported that sexual harassment in the workplace was a major problem.

And when women are assaulted, cheated out of money, or locked up on the company's grounds, they often do not know where to turn. They also feel as though they are the only such victims. That is another reason a

handbook with personal stories is so critical, said Guerrero.

"Often women say that they are afraid to take action because they do not know anyone else who has done so," said Guerrero. "They feel they are alone, and they fear



New handbook, in English and Spanish, is free.

retaliation for taking action. The women in *Voices for Justice* have come forward so that others will know that they are not alone and that they, too, can speak out."

The handbook is available in both English and Spanish.

Center's book *Speak Up!* inspires entire college

WHITE BEAR LAKE, MINN. — Center resources are in widespread use in classrooms across the country. But its newest anti-bias handbook, *Speak Up!*, has garnered a first. It was chosen as Century College's first campus-wide common book project, distributed to each incoming freshman last fall as well as to all the school's faculty, administration and staff. A total of 6,000 of the free guides are in use there.

"Reaction was incredibly positive," said Tracey Wyman, who headed the project. "It certainly contributed to improving the climate here. We'd see students in the hallway with their *Speak Up!* book, reading it on their own. People have been so excited about it."

When Wyman joined the Century staff in 2000, only about 5 percent of the college enrollment were students of color. Today, Wyman's diversity initiatives have helped increase the number of minority students to about 24 percent. They are



Tracey Wyman explains to Morris Dees how Century used *Speak Up!*

mostly of Hmong descent with Hispanic students ranking second.

She implemented an international program, Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) when she arrived, making Century one of the first higher education institutions to incorporate the 30-year-old program into its protocol.

"I've been on the Teaching Tolerance e-mail list forever and have ordered and used all kinds

of your materials in my classroom over the years," Wyman said. She discovered *Speak Up!* soon after the Center released it. "I saw it and I went crazy," she said.

She described the school's environment as unwelcoming for those who are not a part of the majority. "People will fake nice and cut you behind your back. To do programming for people who are in such denial is hard," Wyman said. "I had been looking for something like *Speak Up!* through every network, something that the average person could read and understand. When I saw it, I went nuts because it was exactly what I could use with everyone."

Wyman presented the guide-

book to school administrators, and they were equally enthusiastic. "Everyone from maintenance workers to faculty staff read the book and began having conversations about what it means to them," she said.

All new students were given a copy during the school's orientation and told to hang onto it. Then the book was distributed to all the college's administration and staff. Extras were offered to faculty wanting to use it in their classroom. During a faculty-wide conference at the beginning of the school year, Wyman offered two sessions that addressed *Speak Up!* and how to use it in class. Discussion questions derived from the book's content, designed to provoke introspection and help understand and eliminate bigotry, were posted on the college's website. Special posters promoting the book were hung all over the campus.

Speak Up! was used in a va-

riety of campus classes, from Reading to Radiography. "The students commented that the book was great, and from their papers, I believe they really got something out of the experience," said Laura Chaffee, a radiography instructor.

Some classes asked students to write descriptions of their own encounters with everyday bigotry. On April 5, a professional acting troupe will be on campus to act out these scenarios for an all-staff conference. A dialogue will follow each in which faculty can discuss how they could handle such situations. "I think it'll really have an impact," Wyman said.

Center founder Morris Dees spoke at Century in January. "It turned out to be a beautiful parallel. Students loved him. It was a feather in our cap," Wyman said. The faculty who used *Speak Up!* in their classrooms had an hour-long session with him to talk about their experience.

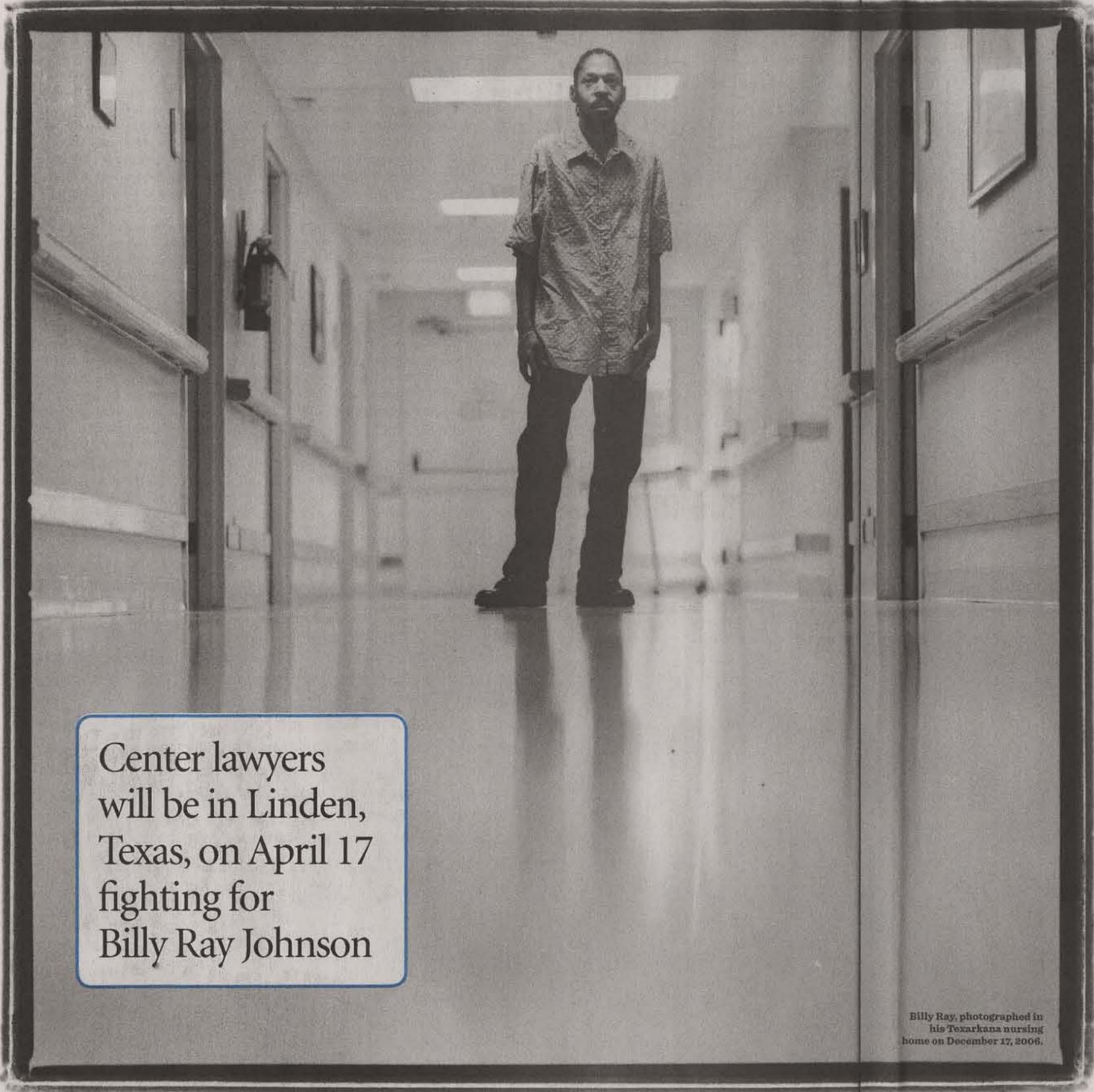
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THE BEATING OF BILLY RAY JOHNSON

On a Saturday night three years ago, a mentally disabled black man from Linden was taken to a party filled with white kids half his age. A few hours later, he was dumped by the side of the road, bleeding and unconscious. But of all the crimes that were committed, none was worse than how the small East Texas town responded—and who were considered the victims.

by PAMELA COLLOFF
PHOTOGRAPHS BY O. RUFUS LOVETT

Billy Ray, photographed in his Texarkana nursing home on December 17, 2006.



Center lawyers will be in Linden, Texas, on April 17 fighting for Billy Ray Johnson

DAYBREAK WAS STILL MORE THAN AN HOUR

away on the morning of September 28, 2003, when Cass County sheriff's deputy John Elder turned down Old Dump Road. Above the tree line, the sky was moonless and dark. Cass County is pressed deep into the northeastern corner of Texas, hard against the Arkansas and Louisiana state lines, and it is crisscrossed by back roads that meander into the woods, under pine awnings and over low-water crossings and past unincorporated communities not found on maps. Elder followed the blacktop as it tacked back and forth, and after roughly a mile, he spotted a silver pickup idling at a T in the road. Two young men who had called the sheriff's department were sitting inside. "He's over here," the driver called out, motioning for the deputy to follow him. Elder fell in behind the pickup as it headed to the left, down a county road that had few houses or mailboxes or signs of life.

They came to a stop after half a mile, and Elder could make out a figure on the ground, huddled in the fetal position. He was a short, slight black man, and he was wearing only a T-shirt and jeans despite the cool weather. Elder knelt down, and after fishing the man's identification out of his pocket, the deputy saw that he was Billy Ray Johnson. Around Linden, the county seat, Billy Ray was often seen hanging around the courthouse square or walking by the side of the road, and he was what people in town politely called "slow." Elder could see that he was alive but in bad shape. The bottom half of his face was bruised and swollen, and his breathing sounded labored. His upper lip was cut, and blood had pooled on the ground under him. His entire body had been badly stung by fire ants. The deputy tried to wake him, but Billy Ray was unconscious.

Elder called for an ambulance and then inspected the pavement, searching for evidence of a hit-and-run. But he found no skid marks or broken glass, and so he turned to the two white men who had led him out there to ask them what they knew. Elder recognized the bigger, heavyset one with the crew cut as 24-year-old Corey Hicks, who had served in the Navy and now worked at the sheriff's

department as a jailer. Elder wasn't familiar with Corey's friend, 19-year-old Wes Owens, who stood with his hands in his pockets and said little. "Now, how did y'all find him?" Elder asked.

Corey shrugged. "We were just riding around," he said, explaining that they had been at a party until early that Sunday morning. "We drove up on him and saw him laying there."

Elder nodded and didn't probe further. Billy Ray smelled of alcohol, and in the absence of any evidence of a hit-and-run, the deputy guessed that the 42-year-old had been out walking and had hit his head when he passed out. The two young men who had led him there were nothing if not helpful; when the paramedics arrived and loaded Billy Ray's limp body onto a gurney, they helped lift him into the back of the ambulance.

But by the following morning, Billy Ray had yet to regain consciousness. A CAT scan found that he had suffered a subarachnoid hemorrhage, a serious brain injury that can be caused by blunt force to the head. While he lay in a coma, word spread that he had last been seen Saturday night at a pasture party with some

Lue Arthur Wilson stands where his cousin was left by the side of the road.





Left: Lizzie Mae Stephenson, Billy Ray's mother, and her son Bonnie still live in Linden. Below: Billy Ray grew up in this trailer with his grandmother.

white boys half his age. Still, the sheriff's department did not grasp that it had a criminal investigation on its hands until Lieutenant Ray Copeland, the department's chief investigator, began receiving anonymous phone calls—three that week, all from what sounded to him like the same soft-spoken white man. "Y'all need to look into what happened to Billy Ray," the caller said, and hung up.

What the investigation unearthed was a story that no one in Linden wanted to believe: Billy Ray, who is mentally disabled, had been taken to a party, ridiculed, called racial slurs, knocked unconscious, and then dumped by the side of the road. Even the strangers who had come to his aid were not Good Samaritans but two of the perpetrators. Had the town's white residents condemned what had happened to Billy Ray, the incident might have faded into memory; the crime pivoted on a single punch. Instead, they closed ranks, and juries in both criminal trials that followed declined to give the defendants more than a slap on the wrist. Now Morris Dees, one of the nation's preeminent civil rights lawyers, has

taken up Billy Ray's case, and Linden—a place most Texans have never heard of—will likely become the focus of national attention when the wrongful-injury lawsuit goes to trial this spring. Whether a new jury will see things differently depends on how Linden perceives its own role in this drama: as a community that must redeem itself or as a small town unfairly maligned by outsiders.

BILLY RAY GREW UP LESS THAN TWO miles from where he had been found, in a sagging white trailer on Old Dump Road. He was raised by his widowed grandmother, Era Lockett Taylor—Miss Era, as she was called—after he was born with meningitis to mentally disabled parents. Billy Ray had five brothers, two of whom were also mentally disabled. (Relatives and neighbors raised all but the youngest son, Bonnie.) As a boy, Billy Ray was able to grasp simple concepts his mother had never mastered, like how to dial a phone number or pay for something in a store, but he couldn't learn to read or write, and he was often the butt of other kids' jokes; on the school bus, his cousins handed over their lunch money to his tormentors so he would be left alone. After he had to repeat the fifth grade, Miss Era



LINDEN RESIDENTS WHO BRAVED THE MEDIA DID LITTLE TO BURNISH THE TOWN'S IMAGE WHEN THEY TRIED TO DOWNPLAY THE CRIME, TALKING ABOUT THE "GOOD BOYS" INVOLVED WHO DESERVED "A SLAP ON THE WRIST."

pulled him out of school for good, and they lived in the woods, apart from the world, for more than twenty years.

Miss Era discouraged anyone from bothering Billy Ray by keeping a 12-gauge shotgun propped beside the door. (A light pole on her property, which is pitted with lead shot, attests to her vigilance.) "No one messed with Billy Ray while Miss Era was alive," said his cousin Lenda Beachum. "We were all scared to death of her. If she said, 'Jump,' we asked her, 'How high?'" Even as an adult, Billy Ray came into town only when Miss Era needed to pick something up at the store, and when she did, he would sit quietly in the passenger seat, gazing out the window. "Everybody always thought he was a nothing and a nobody," said his cousin Lue Arthur Wilson. "I felt sorry for him being stuck out there all by himself. I used to stop by with my guitar and play music for him—he liked Lightnin' Hopkins and Jimmy Reed and Elmore James. I'd play until Miss Era would say, 'Billy Ray, ain't you tired of hearing that fuss?' And then I'd have to get going."

Billy Ray's transistor radio was his constant companion, and each day he sat on whichever side of Miss Era's trailer allowed him to pick up a stronger signal. He liked to slide on his sunglasses and listen to the R&B sta-

tions out of Shreveport and Tyler; at night, he picked up shows that were beamed in from far-away places like Nashville. Though life with Miss Era was tightly circumscribed, he had his own way of traveling beyond Old Dump Road. His grandmother's property was littered with the skeletons of half a dozen or so gutted, rusted-out cars, and he spent hours tinkering with them and taking his favorite ones out for test drives. Sitting behind the wheel, he would steer as if he were flying down the highway. He seemed not to care that the car he was driving had no transmission and was jacked up on concrete blocks in the middle of Miss Era's pasture.

Billy Ray lived with Miss Era until 1995, when she died of cancer and he found himself, at 33, on his own. "She was all he knew," said his younger brother James. "He'd never been out in the world, never been with people his own age. He'd never had a drink until Miss Era died." Billy Ray stayed for two years in James's rent house and then moved in with his mother, who was living in a public housing project a few blocks from the courthouse square. Free to go where he pleased, he spent his days walking around town, nodding and smiling at strangers, but without Miss Era to look after him, sometimes he was at loose ends. A sandwich might be his only food for

the day, or some peanut butter straight out of the jar. He bought a snappy new suit with one of his disability checks, but he didn't understand that it needed to be cleaned, and he wore it again and again until he looked like the homeless person that many people in Linden assumed him to be.

On the weekends, Billy Ray helped out at his cousin Lue's honky-tonk, the Bee Hive, a black club on one of Linden's back roads where patrons brought their own coolers and anyone was welcome to play the blues guitar. Billy Ray swept floors and picked up empty beer bottles and largely kept to himself, and yet customers enjoyed laughing at his expense. "People thought it was funny to make an ass out of him," Lue said. "They'd say, 'Come on, Billy Ray, you going to dance tonight?' And so he'd

This page, top: Wes Owens, Dallas Stone, Corey Hicks, and Colt Amox were all charged with aggravated assault. Bottom: A mural depicting black sharecroppers has hung in the Linden post office since the late thirties. Opposite: Police chief Alton McWaters contacted the FBI after he decided that the case might qualify as a hate crime.



stamp his feet and stick his neck out and shuffle around for them. He couldn't dance, but he loved the attention." At the projects, Billy Ray was an even easier mark. "He was real popular once a month when he got his disability check," Lue said. "Women would sweet-talk him, crackheads would hit him up for loans. They'd say, 'Can I borrow some money and pay you back tomorrow?' Billy Ray didn't know no better. He was everybody's friend."

One afternoon in October, Lue took me to the house on Nelson Street where Billy Ray had been living with his mother in September 2003—a gray, dilapidated frame house where two days' worth of rain had turned the hard-packed dirt yard into a pool of mud. It was still home to Billy Ray's mother, Lizzie Mae

Stephenson, who was slumped inside on a faded flower-print sofa, her body folded into its cushions. She was a small, frail woman in her seventies, and she did not seem to notice when we came in. The house was illuminated by a single bare bulb, and the rooms looked as if they had not been cleaned in years. Unwashed clothes were piled in heaps on the floor, and half-eaten plates of food rested on the kitchen counters. Roaches climbed the walls and skittered across the dining room table. Lizzie sat, staring at the wall, loudly humming a weird, gloomy tune. Her son James's girlfriend, Tina Thomas, had stopped by to check in and was trying to engage her in conversation, to which Lizzie at last responded with a few low, guttural sounds. She looked

around the room, and when her eyes focused on me, a stranger, she looked frightened. She lifted herself off the couch and hurried into the bathroom, locking herself inside.

Lizzie, the family told me, had not been mentally disabled at birth. When she was an infant in Sulphur Springs—a little more than an hour's drive west of Linden—her parents, who were itinerant sharecroppers, had been coming back from church one Sunday when a group of white teenagers started throwing rocks at them. Lizzie was struck on the head, over her left eye, and the impact had cracked her skull open. She was forever changed, according to her sister Essie Lee Pryor; as a child, she was unable to do even menial work, and when the rest of the [CONTINUED ON PAGE 186

Billy Ray Johnson

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 123

family picked cotton, she sat and watched. Even the children Lizzie went on to have who were not mentally disabled had never known a normal life. One son is currently in prison for aggravated assault; another was murdered in 1995. As I listened to Tina try to coax Lizzie out of the bathroom, I wondered how her life—and Billy Ray's—might have turned out if not for the cruel trajectory of one rock.

When Lizzie emerged, she sat down beside me, and I explained that I was working on an article about Billy Ray. At the mention of his name, she covered her face with her hands and began to cry out, "My son, my son, my son..."

The pasture party had already gotten under way that Saturday night when Wes Owens eased his pickup away from the bonfire and headed for the Country Store to buy some snuff. Wes was everything that Billy Ray was not. He was from an influential Linden family and had been a popular varsity football player in high school. But in a small town like Linden, which has 2,275 residents, even the most divergent lives are somehow connected, and when Billy Ray ambled into the Country Store that night, he and Wes stopped to shake

hands. Their families had been acquainted for a long time; Billy Ray's father and two of his brothers used to work summers picking peas and hauling hay on Wes's grandfather's farm. The Owens had given the Johnsons food and secondhand clothes over the years, and Wes had sometimes offered Billy Ray rides around town.

As they stood and talked that night, Billy Ray wore his usual lopsided grin. And then Wes—"the life of the party," according to friends, a guy who liked to be the center of attention—had an idea. He casually mentioned that he had invited some people to his father's place up the road, and he asked if Billy Ray wanted to join them.

Billy Ray shook his head. "I'm waiting on a ride," he said.

"I'll bring you back up here when your ride's supposed to be here," Wes offered. Though Wes had never invited him to a party before, Billy Ray was not in the habit of questioning things. He agreed and climbed into Wes's truck.

Wes drove less than a mile up the road to his father's property and turned into a wide, grassy pasture where pickups were parked in a circle around a bonfire. According to court documents and police records, it was after midnight when they arrived, and about a dozen people were sitting on their tailgates drinking beer.

When they looked to see who Wes had brought from town, they burst out laughing. One girl overheard twenty-year-old Colt Amox snicker, "Wes has a crazy nigger with him."

Wes would later say that he had never intended for Billy Ray to become the night's entertainment, but from the moment they arrived, the joke was on Billy Ray. Wes introduced him to his friends, making up nonsensical names for them as he went. Colt was "Bolt," while others were "C'mon," "We-pee," and "Casey Macaroni." Guileless, Billy Ray nodded and told each of them, "You can just call me Bill." Wes turned on some music and handed Billy Ray a beer, and soon he had Billy Ray dancing to Lil' Kim's "Magic Stick." Wes passed an imaginary stick back and forth to him while the group looked on and laughed.

When the fire began to fade, Wes had him unload wood from the bed of his truck, and the errand became a game to see how much firewood he could pile on as he raced to and from the pickup. "Come on, Billy Ray, you can get more than that!" people shouted. Someone suggested that he reach into the fire and pull out one of the burning logs, and as Billy Ray bent down to comply, Wes stopped him. "Don't be stupid," he said.

The teasing had started to make some people uneasy, and before long, more than half the group decided to go home. Erica Hudson, a freshman at Tyler Junior College, told Wes as she was leaving, "It's not right."

Corey Hicks, who had recently gotten off work at the jail, drove up as the party was thinning out. He lived with Wes's sister, with whom he had two children. When Corey arrived, he turned to a heavy-lidded eighteen-year-old named Dallas Stone. "Why did Wes bring this stupid nigger out here?" he asked.

Dallas shrugged. "For a joke," he said. Only six people remained at the party, including Billy Ray, and everyone was drinking heavily. As the night wore on, a pretty twenty-year-old student named Lacy Dorgan—the only woman left at the party—wandered off to throw up, and Wes followed her. The dome light inside her Mustang was on when she and Wes started having sex a few minutes later, and Corey watched them from a distance.

Bored and drunk, Corey, Colt, and Dallas nursed their beers while Billy Ray sat alone by the bonfire. Dallas would later claim that Corey said, "I wish someone would beat this nigger up." Corey was known for using incendiary language when it came to blacks, and several years earlier he had started a fight at a party with six black men in which he did not come out the victor. He couldn't beat up Billy Ray himself, he told Colt and Dallas, or he might lose his job, but he thought someone else should.

After some goading, Colt agreed to do it, and the three friends all started to laugh. (Colt denies making this pledge.)

Until that point, rap music had been playing, but Colt switched it to country, which elicited complaints from Billy Ray. "If you don't like the music, you can go," Colt told him.

"You'd better leave, before the KKK comes and gets you," Dallas taunted him.

Billy Ray seemed to think they were joking, and he laughed along with them. "I'll go after I finish my beer," he said.

Dallas knocked the beer out of his hand. "You're finished now," he said.

Wes had dashed up, pulling on his pants as he ran from Lacy's Mustang, but it was too late. Colt, who had been a pitcher at Linden-Kildare High School, took a swing at Billy Ray, hitting him squarely in the face. He delivered a knockout punch. Billy Ray fell to the ground and stopped moving.

For nearly an hour the group debated what to do as Billy Ray lay a few feet away from them, unconscious. Wes thought they should call an ambulance, and both Dallas and Lacy offered to drive him to the hospital. But Corey overruled them and began barking orders. He did not want the police involved, he said, because his job was on the line. They were going to take Billy Ray to a back road and leave him there, he insisted, assuring the group that he would eventually wake up and walk home. At one point during the discussion, Wes grabbed Billy Ray and lifted him to his feet, trying to make him stand up on his own. When his legs would not support his weight, Wes let him go, and he fell backward, hitting his head on the ground. Finally they loaded him into the bed of Colt's truck, and Corey led the way while the others followed. Rather than driving a mile north to the hospital, he headed in the opposite direction, toward Old Dump Road. Wes thought Billy Ray might still have some family out there, but they decided against leaving him near a house for fear that someone might see them.

As Corey drove, he asked Lacy, who was riding with him, if she would sit closer. He and Wes's sister were having problems, he confided, and he had liked her for a long time.

"Why did this happen?" Lacy asked, changing the subject. "Why?"

"Because he's a fucking nigger," Corey said.

They turned off Old Dump Road, down County Road 1620, and unloaded him onto the road's shoulder. From there, Colt drove to the car wash in Linden, where he cleaned blood and vomit out of the bed of his pickup. Panicked, Dallas drove to a friend's house and woke him up to tell him what had happened; then he ran to the bathroom and got sick. Wes

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went to Corey's house, and they decided to drive back to check on Billy Ray. He was still breathing, but they could see he was bleeding from his mouth. Almost two hours had passed since he had been knocked unconscious, and they wondered if he might be dying. Corey called the sheriff's department on Wes's cell phone. "There's a black man out here on the side of the road," he said. "He must have got drunk and fell out."

The investigation did not begin in earnest until that Thursday morning, four days after the attack, when Lieutenant Copeland sat Corey down to ask him a few questions after he finished his shift at the jail. When Copeland asked him to describe what had happened early Sunday morning, Corey recounted what he had already told Deputy Elder—he and Wes had been riding around when they came across Billy Ray—and he expressed concern for the stranger's welfare. "Do you know how he's doing?" he asked, adding that he had called the hospital a few times to check on Billy Ray's condition. (He did not tell Copeland that he had also visited the hospital with Wes and had made inquiries about Billy Ray at the front desk.) Their meeting ended with the investigator asking Corey to write a full report detailing what had occurred. Several hours later, Copeland received a call. "I need to talk to you about what we discussed this morning," Corey said, and asked if Copeland would come by his house.

Corey had heard from someone at the sheriff's department that he had been fingered as Billy Ray's assailant, and when Copeland arrived, he was quick to try to set the record straight. Waiting on the porch with him were Wes and Colt, who let him do the talking. Billy Ray had in fact been assaulted, Corey told Copeland, and it was his friend Colt—whom he pointed to—who had done it. As the investigator listened, Colt then narrated his version of events: how he had been sitting alone by the bonfire, waiting for his friends to return from town, when a black man had approached him on foot from out of nowhere. The man had been physically aggressive and had advanced toward him, demanding that he turn off the country music he was playing. Colt had repeatedly asked him to leave, and when the stranger moved toward him again, Colt had knocked him out with one punch. Frightened, he had single-handedly loaded the man into his pickup, driven him into the woods, and left him by the side of the road. When he was finally able to track down Corey and Wes, he showed them where he had left the man, Colt said, and his friends had notified the sheriff's department after he had gone home.

Colt's account started to unravel as soon as Linden police investigator David Martinez began to interview other people who had attended the party, particularly Lacy Dorgan. (After Colt gave his statement, the case was turned over to the police department, since the pasture where the crime had taken place was located within the city limits.) As a fuller picture emerged of what had happened that night, Martinez voiced the opinion that Linden might have a hate crime on its hands. That, an officer at the sheriff's department told me bitterly, "was like striking a match to dry brush." Police chief Alton McWaters called in the FBI to investigate possible hate crimes and civil rights violations. The Associated Press picked up the story, and TV news trucks from Shreveport began rolling into town. The following week the *Texarkana Gazette* ran the first of four damning editorials. ("We were vilified," one resident recalled.) Linden residents who braved the media did little to burnish the town's image when they tried to downplay the crime, talking about the "good boys" involved who had been remiss only in letting things get "out of hand" and who deserved "a slap on the wrist." Wilford Penny told the *Chicago Tribune* one month after stepping down as Linden's mayor that the incident had been "an unfortunate and senseless thing" but that "the black boy was somewhere he shouldn't have been."

Billy Ray had regained consciousness on Wednesday, but the trauma to his head had resulted in permanent brain damage. (Having retained no memory of what had happened to him, he was unable to help investigators.) There was little dignity in his condition; he drooled and soiled himself, and his speech was severely impaired. When he tried to talk, his lips and tongue would not cooperate, and to all but a few family members who grew accustomed to the way he grunted his words, he was unintelligible. He had difficulty swallowing food and walking unassisted, and he often sat in his hospital bed and cried in frustration. After a month, when he still could not feed or dress himself, he was transferred to a nursing home in nearby Texarkana, where he gradually learned to walk again and recovered control of his bodily functions.

And yet, after Corey, Wes, Colt, and Dallas were each arrested and charged that October with aggravated assault (Lacy, who cooperated with investigators, was not charged), they were seen, by some, to be victims as well. "These boys' names are ruined for life," Corey's mother, Martha Howell, later told one reporter. "And [Billy Ray] is better off today than he's ever been in his life. He roamed the streets, the family never knew where he was.

Now in the nursing home he's got someone to take care of him."

Sympathy for the four young men only deepened tensions. "She talked as if her son had done us a favor," observed Lue. And the casual attitude about the harm done to Billy Ray was not limited to one defendant's mother; among most whites, the crime seemed to provoke little outrage. "When this happened, the white community was quiet," said the Reverend David Keener, of the Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist Church, where blacks have worshipped since 1843. "No one stepped forward and said, 'This is wrong.' What had happened was awful enough, but the silence was worse." To blacks, who make up 20 percent of the town, the indifference was only the latest symptom of what many considered to be an Old South mind-set that permeated life in Linden, most plainly in a mural that had hung in the town's post office since the late thirties called *The Cotton Pickers*, in which three dark-skinned, barefooted sharecroppers are depicted toiling in the fields. The image and its prominence in one of Linden's most public buildings were telling, some said, since neither native sons Scott Joplin, the ragtime composer, nor T-Bone Walker, who introduced the electric guitar to the blues, had ever been memorialized. "Generations of blacks saw that mural every time they sent a letter or bought a stamp," Benjamin Dennis, the president of the Greater Texarkana NAACP, told me. "And the message they took away from it was that they shouldn't aspire to be anything greater than a cotton picker."

But the criticism from outsiders struck a nerve. Residents did not want to endure more scrutiny or hear assessments of their town's flawed race relations. Most of all, they worried that any stain on its reputation could scuttle chances of economic renewal. Linden, which lacks even a stoplight, is bleak. U.S. 59, which used to be the main thoroughfare through town, was rerouted around Linden in the fifties, and two decades later, a Wal-Mart opened in the nearby town of Atlanta. Now the courthouse square is deserted, even in the middle of the day, and handwritten signs that read "Closed due to illness" and "Back later" hang indefinitely in empty store windows. People must commute to find steady work, and so they punch the clock at the paper mill in Domino, the steel mill outside Lone Star, and the Army depot west of Texarkana. Civic leaders had hoped to bring in visitors by showcasing Linden's rich musical heritage, using the Music City Texas Theater, a restored American Legion hall that had proved successful in booking big-name acts, as an anchor. (The Eagles' Don Henley, who has played sold-out shows at the

theater, also grew up in Linden.) But the bad publicity threatened all that, and many locals hoped that if they ignored what had happened, it would simply disappear.

When I visited Linden last fall, few white people would agree to speak to me about the case. Those who did were wary of being quoted, and few of them showed much sympathy for Billy Ray. Anger still ran deep, and not at the defendants; it was Billy Ray, somehow, who had brought this upon Linden. People told me he was "a street person," "a drunk who wandered the streets," "a homeless guy who danced for money," "a known crackhead." Never mentioned was the defendants' own prodigious alcohol consumption. By his own admission, Dallas had drunk ten beers before arriving at the pasture party, and he knocked back eight or nine more once he was there. But he and his friends were "typical teenagers," residents told me, and "good kids." Billy Ray was not even mentally disabled, I was informed by the executive director of Linden's Economic Development Organization, Russell Wright. "He cooked his brain on drugs," he explained. To see things any other way was to see Linden in a very ugly light.

Not until March 2005, a year and a half after the arrests, did the first defendant go to trial, and from the start of the *State of Texas v. Christopher Colt Amox*, it was apparent that justice might be hard to come by. Cass County district attorney Randal Lee had his assistant district attorney, Tina Richardson—a black woman who was the county's only other prosecutor—try the case. But during the five-day proceeding, Lee did not assist her or take part in the state's prosecution. "I drove fifty-five miles each morning to attend the trial, and I never saw the district attorney walk across the hall," said the NAACP's Dennis, who had previously attended a less-high-profile trial of a black defendant at which Lee had been present every day. "A DA who wants to bring the full judgment of his office down on an individual is going to make sure that jurors see him in the courtroom. It was obvious from the start that the full resources of the DA's office had not been thrown behind this case."

Colt, the defense's only witness, took the stand and testified on his own behalf. "I want everybody to know the truth," the clean-cut young man told the jury, which was made up of ten whites and two blacks. Colt's attorney, Corky Stovall, began by guiding him through a show-and-tell of photos that pictured him smiling beside black teammates and acquaintances and then brought him to the crux of the message that he needed to impart to the jury: He had acted in self-defense. "He was com-

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ing toward me," Colt testified, explaining that he had feared Billy Ray and had taken several steps away from him. "I mean, he could have hit me, stabbed me, shot me. I don't know this man from anybody... Once he got to me, I felt like he was going to hit me, so I hit him, one hit in the mouth." Colt denied ever using racial slurs, and he told the jury that he had made bad decisions—like driving Billy Ray into the woods and then washing out the bed of his pickup afterward—because Corey had pressured him to do so. Even the false accounts he had given to investigators had a noble justification. "I was trying to keep my friends out of trouble," he told jurors.

In her cross-examination, Richardson pressed Colt to explain how the well-built former athlete could have felt physically intimidated by a man whom she estimated to weigh just over one hundred pounds—and who, unlike Colt, had had no friends with him to back him up. "Even a small person can shoot somebody or stab somebody," Colt replied.

But Richardson overlooked one of the most powerful pieces of evidence that the state had to discredit his defense, which the FBI had turned up during its investigation: The morning after the assault, when Dallas had showed up for work at the Dairy Queen, he had confided in a friend that Colt and Corey were planning on making up a story to tell police that cast Billy Ray as the aggressor. Dallas, who had turned state's witness, was not questioned about this at trial. He only testified that he had not seen Billy Ray behave aggressively toward Colt and that the assault had been unprovoked.

After several hours of deliberation, jurors acquitted Colt on both felonies—aggravated assault with bodily injury and injury to a disabled person by omission—which had each carried the possibility of a ten-year prison sentence. In doing so, they rejected the idea that Colt had targeted Billy Ray because of his race. They settled instead on a lighter charge, misdemeanor assault. The jury also recommended a suspended sentence: in other words, no jail time. Billy Ray's family wept as the verdict was read.

A similar scene played out when Corey was tried two months later. There were plenty of unflattering facts entered into the record; Wes, who had also turned state's witness, testified that Corey had said of Billy Ray, "Someone needs to whip the shit out of him." But the jury was disinclined to convict him of assault when he had not thrown the actual punch. Corey was found guilty of injury to a disabled person by omission, or essentially failing to render aid. The jury was split along racial lines over the proper punishment, with its one black juror a holdout for jail time. But in the end, once again,

the jury recommended a suspended sentence. When I met with the jury foreman, a warehouse manager named John Reed, he explained that some jurors had thought Billy Ray—who had taken the stand to give a few halting answers—had faked his symptoms and had practiced seeming slow and walking poorly. "As far as I'm concerned, everyone's to blame," Reed said. "Wes Owens shouldn't have carried him out to that party, and Billy Ray should have known better than to go drink beer with a bunch of white boys."

Judge Ralph K. Burgess, citing the graveness of the crimes, set aside the juries' recommendations and gave each of the defendants short jail terms. Corey received a sixty-day sentence, to be served at the Cass County jail, which he had been summarily fired from during the investigation. The other three received thirty-day sentences. But the penalties were little consolation to people like Lue, who had fed and bathed Billy Ray between his stopovers at different nursing homes and who had seen firsthand how his cousin had suffered. "The verdicts sent a message: 'It's okay to treat a black man that way,'" Lue said when I visited him last fall. He showed me a small item he had clipped from the *Cass County Sun*, which he had glued to a piece of loose-leaf paper for safekeeping, about a black man named Burks Mack, who had illegally dumped some tires near Old Dump Road. For his crime, Mack had received six months in the county jail. "The only way I can figure it, a bunch of old tires is worth more than Billy Ray," he said.

Lue echoed the sentiments of many blacks in Linden when he told me that the outcome would have been different had the races of those involved been reversed. "I didn't go to law school, and I'm not a well-educated man," said the Vietnam veteran and retired steelworker. "But I know enough to know that something ain't right. If four black men had taken a mentally retarded white man to a party, made a monkey out of him, called him racial slurs, assaulted him, dumped him by the side of the road, and lied to the police about it, you can bet they would've gone to the penitentiary for a long, long time."

The civil suit, which the Southern Poverty Law Center has filed on Billy Ray's behalf, is slated to go to trial on April 2. Based in Montgomery, Alabama, the nonprofit group takes on high-profile civil rights cases, as it did most famously in 1987, when lawyer Morris Dees won a \$7 million verdict that bankrupted the United Klans of America after two of its members in Mobile lynched a young black man named Michael Donald. Billy Ray's suit, which names the four defendants, is seeking un-

specified damages to cover the cost of speech and physical therapy as well as long-term care. "This justice system totally failed Billy Ray and his family," Dees told me. "We want to give a jury the chance to correct an injustice in their community by presenting all the facts, many of which were not available to the juries in the criminal cases." When I asked if he was worried about the odds of finding twelve impartial people to impanel, Dees claimed to be unconcerned. "These jurors grew up in a Christian community, and they know what's right from wrong," he said. "We have to present the case so they can see that Billy Ray is a human being who deserves to be treated just like anyone else."

Just as hard as winning a settlement may be extracting any money from the defendants, who have spent the past three years working menial jobs while their friends have gone on to college. Wes intermittently works construction in Alaska; Colt is a truck dispatcher in Mount Pleasant; Dallas works for a heating and air company in Little Rock, Arkansas; and Corey is employed at a company that finds jobs for felons and minorities. They have all left Linden.

Billy Ray currently lives in a nursing home in Texarkana, where I went with Lue to visit him one afternoon last fall. Bouquets of plas-

tic flowers brightened what was otherwise a dreary place. Just beyond the entryway, an Alzheimer's patient wheeled himself down the hall, which smelled of bleach and urine. An obese man in a nursing gown sat next to a beat-up piano, chewing his lower lip and watching *Gunsmoke*. We went to Billy Ray's room, where a small window afforded a glimpse of the sidewalk outside; his roommate dozed while a TV droned in the background. Billy Ray broke into a grin when he saw Lue, and he nodded at me, wordlessly sticking his hand out in greeting. He was even thinner than in the photos I had seen of him. His T-shirt hung loosely from his delicate frame, and his gray sweatpants were secured at his waist with a belt. He wore his hair in braids, and each time he smiled, he revealed a few wildly uneven teeth. Along the side of his shoes' thick white rubber soles his name was written in indelible black ink.

Billy Ray sat quietly with his hands clasped in front of him while Lue asked him a few questions. He had trouble making even simple conversation, and when he did, his words came out as strange, mangled sounds that Lue often had to decipher for me. Still, he was eager to communicate; he showed us his collection of audiotapes, which he kept in a plastic bag, handing over each cassette for us to look at. Afterward he took us on a tour, and he proved to be pop-

ular with the nurses. "How you doing, Billy Ray?" said each woman who strode by, and he returned the attention with a shy smile. He did not need a wheelchair any longer, but he still walked stiffly, with his shoulders hunched over, moving like a man nearly twice his age. When we passed a woman with snow-white hair, Billy Ray pointed at her and said, "We friends." We followed him outside into the courtyard, where he stopped and stood in the sunlight for a moment and closed his eyes, taking in the warmth of the late fall afternoon.

When we went back inside, we sat down in the lounge to talk. Lue said that it would be all right to ask Billy Ray about the assault, but as soon as I broached the subject, he began folding and refolding the white jacket in his lap.

"Do you remember anything about that night?" I asked him.

"Bonfire," he said, nodding.

"Do you remember anything else?"

He thought for a long time. "Country Store," he said.

"Do you know how you were hurt?"

"No, ma'am."

"What do you think about what happened?"

Billy Ray furrowed his brow, and Lue and I had to lean forward to hear what he said next. "Wasn't right," he said, shaking his head. "Wasn't right." ♦

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