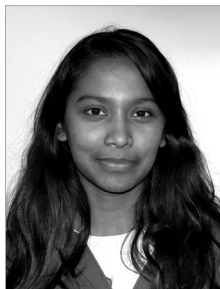




The Truth Can Hurt



Nientara Anderson

Nientara Anderson was born in Queens, N.Y., but she grew up in Sri Lanka. A graduate of Yale University and a recent immigrant to Jackson, she is working as a painter and a sculptor. She wrote the museum cover story for this issue.



Roy Adkins

Roy Adkins, a local artist and photographer, is a Mississippi State graduate. He blends portrait and fine art photography together to create images with character and aesthetic quality. He took photographs of the museum for this issue.



Nate Glenn

Nate Glenn is a computer programmer and photographer who lives, works and loves his beautiful wife in Jackson. Check out his blog and photographs at 360.yahoo.com/n8_glenn. He took the photograph of the Jacksonian for this issue.



Natalie A. Collier

Assistant Editor Natalie A. Collier is originally from Starkville, but has lived here ever since she graduated from Millsaps College. She's not easy to impress. Try. Natalie directed the A&E section for this issue.



Melishia Grayson

Jackson native Melishia Grayson is a graduate of Lanier High School and is currently a sophomore mass communications major at Jackson State University. The editorial intern assisted with the art preview and other pages.



Andi Agnew

Andi Agnew grew up in Crystal Springs, but Jackson has always been home. She works as an advocate for people with disabilities. She loves music, sushi, yoga, pub quiz and her boyfriend's cooking. She wrote a CD review for this issue.



Tiffany Fitch

Tiffany Fitch was dragged to Mississippi from Dalton, Texas, in 2001. When not chasing her four munchkins through the house or caring for the stable of rescued animals, she writes about the state she has come to love. She wrote the Jacksonian.



Matt Saldaña

Raised in Chicago and Boston, Matt Saldaña received a degree in Latin American Studies from the University of North Carolina. He has blogged every day of the James Ford Seale trial at roadtomeadville.com, and he wrote this issue's Seale story.

Areckoning happened last week in the James O. Eastland Federal Courthouse in Jackson. A lot of truth came out before anyone ever took the stand to testify in the James Ford Seale trial for the kidnapping of Charles Moore and Henry Dee.

With Judge Henry Wingate, an African American with a soothing demeanor, asking them questions, potential jurors from across the southern half of Mississippi answered questions about their own race past.

In so doing, these jurors arguably constituted the closest Mississippi may ever come to a truth commission, such as happened in South Africa after apartheid, in which participants in racist incidents came forward to talk about them without fear of prosecution. The results of the voir dire—the fancy name for jury selection—were surprising even to the most hardened court watchers looking on.

In many ways, it was excruciating to watch, as captured in Matt Saldaña's daily posts on the JFP's Road to Meadville blog (www.roadtomeadville.com). Both blacks and whites talked about incidents that, clearly, they had never discussed in public before, perhaps not in private, and certainly not in "mixed" company. Many broke down in body sobs. At one point, U.S. Attorney Dunn Lampton hid the Kleenex box so as to not "encourage them," he quipped. Didn't work.

Juror No. 6 was a black male who became visibly upset, saying that the case was making him think of "things I didn't want to think about" from the past. "In McComb, I was running for my life—churches were being bombed," he said. "The preacher said, 'Run, run!' We had to run," he said.

"(The Ku Klux Klan) rode through—shot up houses. You had to cut your lights out," he added. "I really don't want to be on (the trial) because I couldn't be impartial or anything like that."

Juror No. 69, a white woman in her 60s from George County, said her father had been a member of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan—the Seales' bunch—and had sexually abused her until she was 18 years old. She said that she found out about the Klan when her father took her into the woods to show her his cache of guns. Once, she told the court, she saw her father strike a black police officer in Vicksburg. "It wasn't right for him to hit someone because he was black," she said.

Most striking to me has been some of the jurors' extreme stress—over simply being asked to talk about the state's race history. Striking, but not surprising. We live in a state where the past has been placed in a box that we might open every now and then, ever so gingerly and briefly, then slam closed before people start whining too much about being asked to "apologize for the past."

Voir dire closely resembled painful, messy, excruciating group therapy. And the trial promises more of the same, as former Klansman Charles Marcus Edwards tells his

story of helping capture and torture Moore and Dee to the jury and to the public.

"[W]e'd do most anything we thought had to be done to stop integration and keep separation of the races," Edwards testified. Or as the Klan oath put it, Klansmen like Edwards and Seale were pledging to follow "the spirit of Christian militancy" to "combat Satan" and "preserve Christian civilization."

Except that they weren't—which even Edwards seems to know, now. Outside the presence of the jury, Edwards apologized to Dee and Moore for the murders.

One of the compelling details about a case filled with them—Klansman v. Klansman; a black judge; two blonde female lawyers; and group therapy as voir dire—is that defending Seale compels the defense attorneys to try to bury even more Klan history along the way. Maybe it's good lawyering, but it just follows this state's pattern of burying the past. Fortunately, the judge isn't going for it.

As a result, the Klan dirtiness is being aired out for all to see—and from an active insider, not a paid informant, this time. This is good, if painful. We need to know in order to understand the deep pain between the races in our state and then, God willing, cure it.

But the risk is still very great that this, too, shall pass—and many people won't be much wiser for it. Too many folks seem to think that we can only handle bits and pieces of the truth, and must be spoonfed whitewashed versions that have become acceptable.

For instance, media reports said for years that Dee and Moore were random victims of Klan violence. Actually, as the JFP learned two years ago, the Klan was after Dee specifically because they suspected him (rightly) of civil rights activity. That fact has helped the feds

have jurisdiction in the case.

We have also reported that the Klan feared that blacks were arming themselves, and were beating Dee and Moore to get information—a radically different, yet more accurate report than the media gave over the years—and one that came out in court Tuesday. As late as last week, The Clarion-Ledger downplayed the idea that blacks were stockpiling guns for self-defense in Franklin County. But they were, as were many blacks in South Mississippi. Blacks taking up arms finally broke Jim Crow in our state, as nonviolence was not working in the country's most entrenched region.

But the whitewashed story we're told is a simple one of black victimhood.

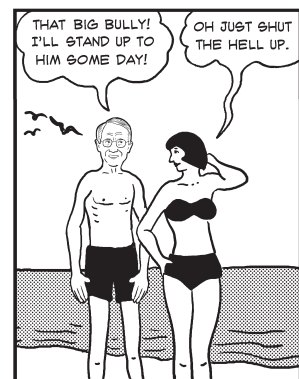
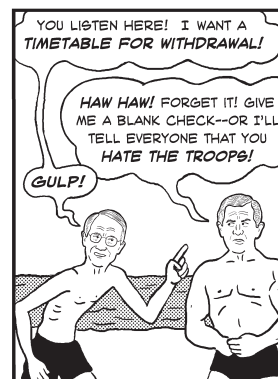
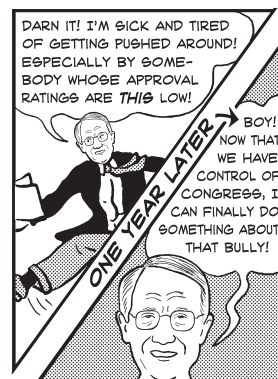
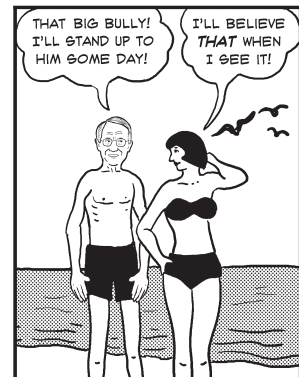
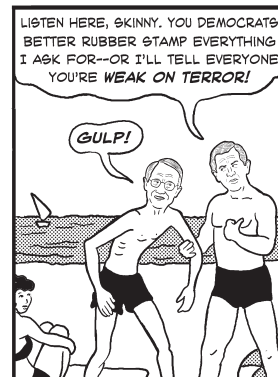
If The Clarion-Ledger has its way, this will be the last case, really it will. It seems they're tired, so it's time to stop telling stories of past civil-rights atrocities. Just last Sunday, the Ledger wrote a kind-but-puffy piece about the families of murder victims like Wharlest Jackson and Ben Brown. The paper declared that the cases would never be prosecuted (much as it had done about the Dee-Moore case).

How can they know that? We don't have many facts because the history as it has been presented to Mississippi by fellow citizens, powers-that-be, our schools and our media is shaped before it gets to us. There are people deciding that we can now handle hearing some stories about a few Kluckers-in-the-Korner—stories that by default exonerate the rest of white society—but true narratives about black men arming themselves to defend their families might not go over so well.

But truth is what Mississippians need. We might cry, or feel uncomfortable, but we can handle it. The only question is whether those who know it can handle giving it to us.

THIS MODERN WORLD

BY TOM TOMORROW



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