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Reflections of a White Southerner in the Freedom Struggle

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Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee

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BOB ZELLNER

REFLECTIONS OF A WHITE SOUTHERNER IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Preamble

Eastern Kentucky University's Chautauqua Lecture Series theme, “Living with Others: Challenges and Promises,” certainly resonates with my life, my experiences and my work for human rights. I have found that a proactive approach to living with others provides a strong antidote to close-mindedness, hate and violence. Living with others peacefully, harmoniously and joyfully broadens and liberates one’s life. This sharply contrasts with my Southern upbringing during the forties and fifties, when white supremacy and male chauvinism led many southerners to be narrow minded and reactionary.

Juxtaposing challenge with promise, as the Chautauqua theme does, is also compatible with my philosophy of life, relying as I do on dialectics, the unity of opposites and the social gospel. Existence in a monoculture where everyone is the same may be peaceful but it is boring. Living together in today’s global culture has its challenges, but it is exciting to say the least.

The core of the overarching theme—*living*—appeals to me also because biography, including autobiography, is an effective learning and teaching method. Speaking to the EKU community, I used stories from my memoir, *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek: A White Southerner in the Freedom Struggle*. If *Murder Creek* seems to castigate all southerners, that is not my intention. In fact, I think reconstructed southerners tend to become great revolutionaries. They stand for progress. Unreconstructed southerners, however, are likely to uphold the worst in our Southern and our national heritage.

Belief and Action

One's belief is, of course, important, so tell me what you think, what your values are—but more importantly, tell me what you do and have done. Having grown up in Alabama, I am familiar with folks chanting affirmations of faith, knowing they didn't mean it. Even as a child I could see a gap between people's professed beliefs and actions. My quest became to find out why one's actions and claimed beliefs are sometimes so far apart. Why, I pondered, did so few white southerners risk life and limb, even ostracism and poverty, in the struggle against segregation?

I searched for authenticity, commitment and risk, as well as harmony between belief and action. I sought out people taking actions that were challenging and exciting to me. The second of five boys with a school teacher mother and preacher father, it was unlikely I would meet Dr. Martin Luther King and Ms. Rosa Parks as a college student in Montgomery and become part of America's most exciting History—the Civil Rights Movement. Perhaps it was providential that my Methodist College, Huntingdon, was smack in the cradle of the modern civil rights struggle.

The odyssey that was beginning there for me, from the KKK to MLK, was a stretch. My father, Methodist minister James Abraham Zellner, while growing up in Birmingham, became a Klan organizer, a Kleagle. He and Mom, Ruby Hardy Zellner, herself the daughter of a Methodist preacher, graduated from Bob Jones College. Now located in Greenville, South Carolina, Bob Jones is called a “university,” but it is still not widely known as a hot bed of Southern Liberalism. Even worse, I was named for Dr. Bob Jones after he performed the marriage of Mom and Dad. In 2012 speak, this means I come from a line of Fundamentalist Terrorists. I must have been a disappointment to my Godfather, Dr. Bob.

Fundamentalism and Terrorism

Have you noticed how fundamentalism and terrorism go together? The nexus between the two seems to be ubiquitous throughout history. Fundamentalist Muslims, Christians, or any other type, might be generally peace loving and protective of those inside their magic

circle. Being a fundamentalist, however, seems to increase one's willingness to harm those perceived to be outside the circle, i.e., infidels. Not only is a fundamentalist allowed to harm others, his creed may even require the deed. Presently a fundamentalist, then, depending on circumstances, voila, a terrorist is born. My father, grandfather and uncles in Birmingham were fundamentalist terrorists, Klan activists. A more ruthless gaggle of nightriders is hard to imagine. Was this the Klavern that killed four little girls guilty of nothing more than going to Sunday school at the 16th Avenue Church one September morning in 1963?

Racism's Pretty Face

Growing up in the slow, lazy countryside of small town Alabama, I treasured trips to bustling, exciting, steel producing Birmingham. It was a long trip at 35 miles per hour in our old '43 Desoto up pre-interstate Route 31 through Montgomery, Prattville, Alabaster and Montevallo. It sometimes snowed during Christmas vacation. I remember Granddaddy as a loving, genial, fun loving old man, not knowing he hated black people for no reason other than their being black. Granddaddy Zellner's picture is in my memoir, holding his walking stick. The caption is irreverent: "The old Klansman with a stick."

Our favorite aunt, Dad's sister, "Ta," a mechanic wearing men's overalls, claimed she could outwork any man. She always took us boys to climb the statue of Vulcan on Red Mountain overhanging the smoking metropolis. Aunt Ta bought steaming hot tamales from a pushcart, as many as we could eat. An active member of the Ladies Auxiliary Ku Klux Klan, she also hated people of color. Negroes fell outside their magic circle.

I was a little boy sitting on Granddad's lap. Smelling of old spice and coal smoke, he spun fabulist tales of working on the railroad, "deadheading" across the country on the Rebel Streamliner. A skilled telegrapher, Granddaddy Zellner was promoted to dispatcher for Gulf Mobile and Ohio. I never thought of his hometown as the "Johannesburg" of America. With this wrenching background, then, it's not surprising my outlook became

that of an existential Marxist attempting to follow Jesus, combining schools of thought and action clearly at odds with one another.

Philosophy to Live by

Dialectics is a useful philosophy when learning about the universe; one becomes comfortable with uncertainty and discomfort. Some of my early mentors advocated an attitude of “creative insecurity.” Democracy itself, they pointed out, is an exercise in dialectics or creative insecurity. In order to maintain our civil liberties, we must allow those who would take away our civil liberties the right to speak. The Klan should be free to rally, the neo-Nazis can advocate and the ignoramuses of the Tea Party are free to blviate. Progressives, countering with better organizing, bigger marches and debate rather than outlawing rightwing First Amendment rights, will win every time. The best remedy for hate speech is not suppression. It is more speech—love speech.

In time of war, like the present one with terrorists of various types around the world, we must fight fiercely to maintain our civil liberties. It’s nonsensical to say: our freedoms are under attack by fundamentalist terrorists, therefore, we must give up our liberties. A cornerstone of democracy is the right to be safe in our persons. Sad to say, since 9/11, Americans have basically given up *habeas corpus*, the right to a fair trial through due process, in the name of national security.

Spirituality and Religiosity

Spirituality, more important to me than religiosity, lets me take the best from all religions and paths of enlightenment. Fundamentalist Muslims are just as capable of misconstruing the concept of jihad as Christian fundamentalists are of misinterpreting the concept of crusade. Looking back, trying to unravel the threads woven into this spiritual, philosophical fabric, my personal trope continues to be towards action. We are products of all we experience, so my current outlook could change at any minute. I remember the exhilaration I experienced upon discovering a new intellectual universe in 1957 when

Rev. Charles Prestwood, a newly minted Doctor of Divinity just returned from Boston University, encouraged us college freshmen to “break our cups.” On fire with the social gospel, Dr. Prestwood, in a deliberate act of subversive teaching, advocated breaking our cups, even though they run over with goodness and abundance. He wanted us to actually question all the things we had been taught in church.

On Fire with the Good News

Last Pentecost Sunday I attended Presbyterian service at the Shinnecock Indian Nation Reservation in Southampton, New York. My spiritual advisor, Dr. Richard Lawless, delivered the sermon. The scripture about flames descending to the tops of the disciples’ heads reminded me of the rebellious young ministers in Alabama. The multitudes, having just heard of this new gospel, at first thought they were drunk, but some said it could not be, as it was only 9 o’clock in the morning. This apparently is the earliest record of people’s hair catching on fire. Dr. Lawless, like my Alabama mentors, has been accused of having his hair on fire. He said in his Pentecost sermon, “Here’s how we might look at society today: while political freedom has increased, the influence of people of faith has probably decreased. Do we see it as our Christian duty to make society better? Does following Jesus mean we feel called to right wrongs and combat injustice? As Christians, are we obliged to try to stop destructive forces from hurting our children and families? Is it time to look to the Social Gospel, as did leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to measure our faithfulness as people touched by the Spirit? *I believe so, with all my heart.*”

Mentors

I sat at the feet of Dr. Prestwood and other progressive ministers through the miracle of my father’s conversion from KKK to the inclusive social gospel of a loving Jesus. Breaking with his family and the Klan, he worked quietly in Mobile with Dr. King and Rev. Joe Lowery. Dad, like Charles Prestwood, Tom Butts, and others, was attracted to the work of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

O.C. Brown, a friend from Huntingdon College, another young Methodist shaped by that time and its events, served a church in the cradle of the Confederacy, Montgomery. During the time of the Selma march, when Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) chairperson John Lewis was so badly beaten by George Wallace's Klan led troopers, O.C. took a stand. After sharing with him a draft of this article, Rev. O.C. Brown wrote to me.

“In a profile,” he said, “about people I’ve known. In it, there is this – ‘The most dynamic person I have ever known was Charles Prestwood—a fantastic intellect, great preacher, warm personally. I was delighted to read that you had met him. When it hit the fan in my church in Montgomery after the Selma March, the two ministers who called me after I had taken a stand in my church were Powers McLeod and Charles Prestwood. Also serving in Montgomery were allegedly friends, and they wouldn’t even return my calls—Red Hildreth, George Gilbert and others. By the way, Prestwood and Don Collins were best friends. Tom Butts—I was particularly glad to see him included in your article. Over the past 60 years, he has been a beacon light for things progressive in the [Alabama-West Florida] Methodist Conference, often at grievous personal cost.”

I was happy for this report. Dr. Butts, currently the pastor emeritus of First United Methodist Church in Monroeville, Alabama, serves as the main helper to Harper Lee, author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

My interest in race and justice, kick-started by Charles Prestwood, was aided and abetted by Dr. Thomas Lane Butts. Methodist youth were fortunate to have several young ministers in segregated Alabama spreading subversion quietly among my cohort of the teenage faithful. The following blog comment brings Doctors Prestwood and Butts together in one paragraph. It is typical of both that they emphasize the organizer’s responsibility to avoid hubris in their work. Tom Butts recently reported: “A friend and colleague, the late Dr. Charles M. Prestwood, who had unusual insight into the games people play in order to gain power without taking responsibility, wrote: ‘The divisions of our day in part grow out of the fact that as slaves we begin by demanding justice and end by wanting to wear a crown.’ There are some who never quite understand that we cannot

wear the crown of thorns and also have the thirty pieces of silver. The truth is that our inclination to comment with authority and casually offer serious advice on every condition we encounter should be accompanied by an equally serious willingness to become actively involved in affecting the solutions we suggest.”

Thomas Butts, in his eighties, continues to break cups, violate mores and he bends toward freedom. At my mother's graveside in Loxley, Alabama, Tom Butts gave the benediction after the Catholic priest had finished the burial ritual. My youngest brother, Malcolm, a converted Catholic Deacon, had provided the priest. Prior to pronouncing the prayer, Dr. Butts, a lifelong Methodist preacher crossed himself and then those around the open grave. Along with the holy water sprayed by the priest and the blessings delivered by Tom, in the midst of my grief and sadness, I thought Mom received a great send off. I asked Tom afterwards about using the sign of the cross. He replied that he believed in the holy Catholic Church and thought it proper for believers to bless themselves and others. That simple act was liberating to me. I have blessed myself ever since with the sign of the cross, almost as often as I breath the serenity prayer, “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”

Casual Hatred

Growing up in lower Alabama is to be exposed to unthinking hatred. I did not know the correct name for Brazil nuts. They appeared around Christmas time and were known only as “nigger toes.” Italian salad on menus was always “wop salad.” To bargain over price was to “Jew someone down.” If you were short changed, you were “gyped.” The South of my childhood displayed prejudice against blacks, Jews, Catholics, immigrants and women. My father told stories of his great aunts railing against “foreigners.” When he countered that the Zellners were foreigners, aunts and uncles would say in chorus, “Yes but we were high class foreigners.”

Prestwood’s concern with divisions between people, and Butt’s insistence that prescription and advice without action is meaningless shaped my life. Action toward

problem solving became the basis of my activism. The term, activist, by the way, was not common in the SNCC in the 1960s. We referred to ourselves as civil rights workers or “organizers.”

Movement Youth Had Similar Upbringings and Experiences

Local people often called us “freedom riders.” My movement involvement was similar to that of many church-bred young southerners, black and white. Sandra Cason Hayden recently wrote a luminous and haunting memory that resonates with my own coming of age in the south. Casey and I, along with our cohort of movement adventurers, including Jane Stembridge, Connie Curry, Dorothy and Rob Burlage, Joan Browning, and Sam Shirah, understood each other and where we came from so well that we seldom felt the need to speak or write about the experience. Along with other white Southerners who rose up for freedom now and always, we are currently writing about growing up white and southern. Casey wrote of her memories for her former husband Tom Hayden’s book on SDS and the history of the Port Huron statement. That declaration along with SNCC’s statement of purpose (drafted by Rev. Dr. James Lawson) became twin manifestos of a legendary generation in American history.

“Only love,” Sandra Cason Hayden wrote, “is radical”:

I was a child of small town Texas, and of a single parent mom, a feminist. We were poor closet liberals. Austin was my Mecca. I [became]... an existentialist at a residential community of learning alongside The University, the only integrated housing on campus, both by gender and by race. We met in rigorous seminars with a collegium of renegade Christian ministers, headed by a chaplain from WWII who'd seen the carnage, demythologizing the church fathers and scriptures; The collegium attempted to create a language of experience: ...Surrendering illusions through honesty, one was opened to creating meaning: an authentic life, freedom. This surrender into reality was "the Christ event". Our freedom, our commonality in receiving it, and our common task of passing it on,

were realized in community through rituals of confession, forgiveness, surrender, and gratitude. . . . We found a remnant of the social gospel, the campus YM-YWCA, as our outpost. I served at the Y's national conference. Men and women led workgroups as equals: Peace; Race Relations; the World of Work; The Changing Roles of Men and Women. Consciously breaking out of the silent postwar generation, we vowed to realize our values, a politics of authenticity. The 50's unfolded into the 60's, the sit-in movement their exalted opening.

Reconstructed Southerners, like "Recovering Catholics," Make Great Revolutionaries

Casey Hayden reminds me of how wondrous it is when southerners change. Her memory of being a stifled southerner hungry for change evoked my evolving consciousness. Shakespeare said the play is the thing. Our movement generation came to believe the ACT was the thing. Authentic politics compelled us to ACT against the evils around us - evils crying out for action. Emerging from the silent generation, young people envisioned poisonous snakes inched closer and closer to our bare feet. Too long, we realized, our foremothers and fathers had talked of making change. We would actually make change. We accomplished a lot. By 1965 the public accommodations and voting acts had passed, setting the stage for a social and economic revolution. Then the national liberal consensus allowing the movement to succeed up to that point broke down.

Ready for Revolution

When serious change, like that advocated by Ms. Ella J. Baker, was placed on the table, liberals ran for high ground. Ending de jure segregation and black voter exclusion, in Marxist terms, certainly completed the bourgeois revolution that was left unfinished following the civil war. Abolishing slavery and achieving democratic rights was certainly a good thing. Moving farther to full social and economic equality, however, in the sense Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Dubois and Ms. Baker understood it, was not all right. No broad, left national consensus existed that would move the nation toward socialist

revolution. This marked the end of the civil right movement. Dr. King's assassination the day before my 29th birthday in 1968 sealed the deal. When King worked to unionize garbage workers in Memphis, while planning a poor peoples' march on the nation's capital, it was over.

The Grow Project

By 1968 SNCC had become an all black organization; many of the white staff began working with SCEF, the Southern Conference Educational Fund. We reached out to poor and working class white southerners, bringing them into coalitions with organized grassroots black folk. We formed GROW, Grass Roots Organizing Work, which we also called Get Rid of Wallace. I remember our joy and amazement when we found former Klansmen in Mississippi willing to switch sides and join the human race. One, M. O. McCarty, a Masonite union activist from Laurel, became a great friend. Once, when criticized for having been in the Klan, M.O. said, "Yes, I'll admit I was in the KKK, even though I am not supposed to say so. I have always been a joiner. Whenever I go to church, if they open the doors to membership, I join. So far I'm a Methodist, a Baptist, a Presbyterian, and a Holiness, and yes, I was a Klansman, but now I have joined the civil rights."

Only later, much later, in fact twenty or thirty years on down the line, did we begin to view human nature as a hard thing to change. Had we known early on, we may never have attempted the GROW Project. We discovered a philosophy of working class organizing that was successful. Large numbers of poor and working class folks from the Deep South could best be reached on a material basis. All who could be reached with the basic movement idealistic message of Christian love, brother and sisterhood had been reached. The majority would have to see that their material wellbeing depended on them changing racist behavior like separate seniority lists at the plant which kept blacks from advancing in skill level and pay. A strike could pit black and white workers against each other, causing the union to be weak rather than being together, strong in unity.

Shriveled Heart Syndrome

Through years of organizing, I have contemplated the difficulty of making basic social change in the south. Using the psychology, sociology and history learned in several bouts with college and graduate school, I developed a social change theory called the shriveled heart syndrome.

Briefly stated, it describes the effect on generations of white Southerners after centuries of standing on the necks of fellow human beings. The act of oppressing fellow humans inevitably shrink the hearts of those doing the oppressing. Evolution apparently works on the mental and spiritual body as well as the physical one. During slavery, I reasoned, whites in North America, especially the south, maintained the institution through force, violence and terror. Enslaving a human is an act of war against that person. To make war against a person or a people, it becomes necessary to learn to hate “those people”. To own a human, unlike owning a mule, the slaveholder must deny the humanity of that man, woman or child. So, growing up in south Alabama among a people who had, for centuries, practiced treating people like objects or mules, I was expected to go and do likewise. To accomplish this degree of dehumanization, individuals in the owning group inevitably suffer a shriveling of their souls and spirit.

An example of this can be seen in microcosm when farm children, trying to get over their tender heartedness when killing chickens, rabbits, pigs and other livestock, withhold sympathy. They manage somehow to harden their hearts. In the same way, southerners get over their innate dislike of mistreating others. They are taught and later teach their children that, “Blacks aren’t the same as you and I; therefore, you may mistreat them.”

Imagine an entire region of people mistreating African Americans (a mild and profoundly understated way of describing slavery from 1617 to 1865) for over two hundred years. These same southern people re-enslaved black people under Jim Crow, the sharecropper and prisoners-for-purchase systems for the hundred years leading up to the voting act of 1965.

If you think it would be terrifying to grow up this way, you have some understanding of my early experience. That was the region of my childhood and adolescence; those were the people - friends, fellow church members, family, and acquaintances - I grew up around. They were steeped in racism and self-hatred to the point that nothing was as it seemed. Wouldn't they of necessity have shriveled hearts? Small hearts leave no room for the milk of human kindness. These are the people I grew up with. Has human kindness dried up in southern white people?

Backwater of Hate, or Looking to the Future?

The South today continues to be a bottomland where acidic puddles of racist poison stagnate. Old black women and men in Mississippi taught me that hate is an acid that corrodes the bucket it is carried in. This is especially true among older white people. Only 11% of whites voting in Alabama pulled the lever for our first black president, Barack Obama. Southerners call him "the foreigner," rejecting the legitimacy of a black President. During the current Republican primary, the entire roster of candidates referred to him as "Obama," never President Obama. They have done their best to intimidate this president from exercising leadership, ready to pounce on him for being an angry young black man. But he has shown leadership, most recently on the right to love the one you chose. Thank you President Obama for showing political courage, rare these days.

Growing up in lower Alabama, I learned that my Great- Granddaddy thought he could not do without slavery. Then Granddaddy Zellner thought he could not get along without segregation. My father's generation of southerners was sure they simply could not get along without opposite sex marriage.

Well I get along fine without slavery and I don't have a personal need for segregation. As for marriage, I have tried it twice without success and hope I am done with it. For those who like it, however, I am happy for them to have it anyway they want it. Opposite sex, same sex, no sex, it is all the same for me.

Wait! Someone brought up bestiality. Was it Republican candidate, Santorum? Man on dog? That might actually give me pause, especially if the man wants to marry his

best friend. Well it only gave me a pause, and a short one at that. If a woman wants to marry her dog and a man wants to marry his horse, who's to say it is not the right thing for them? No skin off my teeth, no harm no foul. Right?

Love the One You Choose

I remember when Chuck McDew, former SNCC Chairman, and I visited my brother David and sister-in-law Ruth in a small town near Knoxville, Tenn. McDew, an African-American born in Massillon, Ohio, was fascinated by the jobs being held down, clung to actually, by my young nephews and their wives, all white southerners, born and bred. It was in the time of the Bush vs. Gore presidential race. We were eating in a Chinese buffet near the airport while waiting for our flight, surrounded by all these rural southerners so quite naturally Chuck asked whom everybody was voting for. Bush was their man one of my nephews proclaimed vigorously.

McDew allowed as how that did not seem right, given the bleak picture they had painted of employment in Knoxville. Looking perplexed, he questioned, "Didn't you say there no good paying jobs and you make hardly enough to pay for gas to and from work? You work at Jiffy Lube, minimum wage and you at Burger King, same wage, one wife at the dry cleaners and another at Wall Mart, and Grandma Ruth has to take care of the babies? Why on earth would you vote for Texan George Bush over Tennessean Gore?"

"Because," my kinfolk fairly shouted in unison, "Bush is going to protect us from gay marriage!" Chuck, completely flabbergasted by now, asked, "Do you know any gay people? Do you know any gay people who are getting married? They all agreed that they didn't know any gay people and didn't know if any of them were getting married.

Later at the airport McDew ruefully told me he had often worried about my poor white kinfolks, hoping they would be able to do better. "Now," he exclaimed, "After what I heard today from your poor nieces and nephews, I will never again worry about poor white people." Amen.

Loving and Living with Others – the Continuing Challenge

So living with others continues to be a challenge in the South. In some ways young southerners are more open to change and less homophobic than their parents. But if the older generations continue to teach their prejudices to their offspring how long will it take. Failure to embrace diversity has allowed a bastion of reaction to invade our entire body politic and I fear the infestation will continue until my region undergoes a thorough change. Many thought the process of integrating the solid south with the rest of the nation was well underway by the end of the sixties - that the south would never go back to its old ways. FDR and his redoubtable wife Eleanor tried mightily to change the politics of my region coming out of the last Great Depression, declaring the South to be the nation's number one economic problem. Struggling to come out of this one, we find ourselves faced with the same problem. During Reconstruction, fair-minded people thought the south could never, would never, return to the all white courthouse and ballot box. In less than a generation, however, former slave owners using violence, ended reconstruction, reclaiming the south while disfranchising Negroes and their poor white allies. Similarly, nobody thought the gains of women, blacks and other oppressed people during the civil rights movement could be taken away again in this country. Currently the GOP, having been hijacked by Tea Party racists and shills for corporate fascism, is doing just that. Will the tiny shrunken hearts of my fellow Southerners be able once again to stave off a concerted assault on its backwardness? Time will tell but there is hope. Challenges exist to be sure, but new and exciting promises are also present. Younger southerners like most young Americans are no longer as cowed by racism, paternalism, and homophobia as their parents and grandparents. More importantly there is a new respect for community organizing and positive social change. Our debonair young President Obama, after all, was a community organizer before trying his hand at leading the "free" world.

My region functions today as a safe rear for rightwing extremism and it anchors Tea Party white nationalism. Morris Dees of the Southern Poverty Law center warns of widespread arming and training of paramilitary extremists. He says that bullying and hatred of gays and immigrants is fueling impending violence on a grand scale. I think the ultra right is gearing up for a serious attempt to foment a new civil war in this country.

The progressives and liberals on the left are woefully unprepared. This makes it imperative that progressives unite once and for all to bring the South into the national fold. And there is historical precedent for organizing the South as a way of liberalizing the body politic.

Wanted—A Third Reconstruction

The south and other pockets of reaction in the West, skews our national politics violently rightward. A basic change in the South will change the politics of the whole country, making American democracy safe for the world. Even a small change could make the country and therefore the world a healthier, safer place. Long-term community organizing seems to be the best solution to the Southern problem. Operation Dixie once attempted to unionize industry in the Southern United States. From 1946 to 1953 in 12 Southern states, labor tried to consolidate gains made by the trade union movement in the Northern United States during the war. Organized labor needed to block the status of the South as a "non-union" low-wage haven to which businesses could relocate. Failure of Operation Dixie to end the South's status as a low-wage, non-union haven impeded the ability of the union movement to maintain its strength in North and contributed to the decline of the American union movement in the second half of the twentieth century. Unions were unable to prevent businesses from holding back wage increases by either moving to the South or threatening to do so. The non-union South holds the nation back economically and has always impeded the fulfillment of civil and human rights. Presently there is no difference between organized labor and the civil rights movement.

My job as a scholar and activist, then, is to propose solutions, make plans and take action, so I am returning to the south after living and teaching in the north for many years. I moved to Wilson, North Carolina where Barton College is located at the end of my short street. A series of miracles landed me here. SNCC and movement people, being angels, will understand. I'm in an old house at the top of a hill near some woods where a bear reputedly lives. Ancient trees from the farm's pecan orchard shade our lot, which anchored vegetable fields along this ridge. I call it Seven Trees Farm. A downpour is

drumming on the old roof, the first rain since I moved here April 13th, a Friday. Recently my old organizing friend, Al McSurely, introduced me to the remarkable Rev. Dr. William Barber, leader of a powerful and diverse coalition of fired up progressive southerners here in NC. Also I want to help focus national attention on the North Carolina Plan and the black power it represents, as well as assist John McNeil, wrongly convicted in Newt Gingrich's district of GA.

Wilson is also the home of John McNeil, an African-American basketball star sentenced to life for the death of a white attacker — a mirror image to Travon Martin. I helped his wife, Anita, who is battling a recurrence of breast cancer; draft a letter to Kerry Kennedy for defense funds.

My new home at Seven Trees Farm, with offices, freedom house and organizing school will serve the eastern black belt region of NC. Our work plan for five years is outlined in the following resolution being presented to the NAACP Convention this July in Houston, attempting to bring organized labor and the NAACP together in a new Operation Dixie. Titled, "Houston, We Have a Problem!" The plan includes the following ideas:

In the 1960s and 1970s, national forces violently opposed to labor and civil rights, adopted a southern strategy to destroy civil rights organizations providing practical support for southern labor and human rights movements. For 40 years we've trod vineyards where the grapes of wrath are stored, waging local and state battles against powerful national forces with unlimited funds for their long-range plan to reinstate segregation, voter ID's, and the whole bag of old tricks of division and hatred.

A conference will convene in the Southern Regions, the 11 former confederate states where anti-labor and anti-civil rights practices continue to plague our neighborhoods, our work-places, our churches and other institutions where we live, work, worship and play; A proposal to be debated in the NAACP should emerge calling for a NAACP-Labor

summit to negotiate a Southern Check-Off where *One Nation Organizing Fund* members can collect \$2 monthly to finance labor and civil rights organizers in 11 confederate states. \$2 of each NAACP member's dues will be set aside to rebuild the southern civil and labor rights movement.

Such a joint plan could change the South from a bastion of the ultra-right wing into a progressive region, making American democracy safe for the world, ending our skewed political spectrum which ranges now from far right to the ultra-center.

NAACP and National Labor, establishing a National Organizing Committee will also plan the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Justice in front of the Lincoln Memorial honoring Dr. King and others of the Moses Generation. The NAACP and labor will then announce the funding and joint sponsorship of the One Nation Organizing Fund.”

The North Carolina Conference of NAACP Branches is blazing the trail for a new era of organizing in the south and the rest of the nation. Rev. Dr. Barber and his cadre of organizers is also challenging the national NAACP to rededicate itself to grassroots organizing, honoring its glorious past.

Action is Required

In keeping with this year’s Chautauqua theme, “Living with Others: Challenges and Promises,” it is clear that real living with others means being willing to change. It also compels those of us dedicated to tolerance and inclusiveness, which I think is a better word, to take action. I was blessed to meet Ms. Rosa Parks as a college student doing research for a sociology paper on the movement. She became a mentor to me and other students at all white Huntingdon College. Once, when trapped in a Montgomery church, Ms. Parks helped five students escape arrest, but not before saying to me, “Bob, when you see something wrong you have to do something about it. You must take action—you can’t study injustice forever.”