

Withdrawal/Redaction Sheet

Clinton Library

DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
001. resume	re: William Ferris [partial] (1 page)	07/03/1997	b(6)
002. memo	Bob Nash to the President [partial] (1 page)	07/21/1997	b(6)

COLLECTION:

Clinton Presidential Records
First Lady's Office
Melanne Verveer
OA/Box Number: 23253

FOLDER TITLE:

Bill Ferris NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] Chair Candidate

2013-0534-S

rc1514

RESTRICTION CODES

Presidential Records Act - [44 U.S.C. 2204(a)]

- P1 National Security Classified Information [(a)(1) of the PRA]
- P2 Relating to the appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA]
- P3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(a)(3) of the PRA]
- P4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(a)(4) of the PRA]
- P5 Release would disclose confidential advice between the President and his advisors, or between such advisors [(a)(5) of the PRA]
- P6 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(a)(6) of the PRA]

C. Closed in accordance with restrictions contained in donor's deed of gift.

PRM. Personal record misfile defined in accordance with 44 U.S.C. 2201(3).

RR. Document will be reviewed upon request.

Freedom of Information Act - [5 U.S.C. 552(b)]

- b(1) National security classified information [(b)(1) of the FOIA]
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Bill Ferris
NEH Chair Candidate

was twenty years ago when I met Motee Daniels. I was viewing for a job at the University of Mississippi, and Lett and Mary Hartwell North offered to drive me out to see at his cabin near Yocona. It was a night I would never forget. We wound along country roads and finally turned into a field and crossed it to a cabin overlooking a lake. A fire burned inside in a stone fireplace, and couples listened to a country music band. I was quickly introduced to Motee and Lucille Daniels who were our hosts for the evening. Their warmth and kindness touched me with a feeling I would rediscover the next time we met again. It was outside, and with dancers, and the fire together we seemed at home in their cabin. It was Motee and Lucille's world.

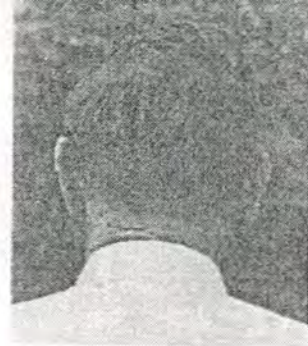
I had heard of Motee and Lucille before they were coming to Oxford. My friend Minor Ferris had rented a room from Motee and Lucille and he was a student at the University and had been adopted by them as if he were a son. I thought they might take a similar attitude to me and was not disappointed. They became my Oxford friends, and I have driven to their cabin so many Sundays for dinner and company.

Over the years I learned to respect and admire Motee as one of the most extraordinary people I have ever known. His intelligence, his honesty, sense of humor and dedication to friends were shining and always so welcome. I never did we meet that I didn't learn and learn from him. His cabin became a haven where we hosted dignitaries who visited the Center to learn about the African South. They were



— ELECT —
**MOTEE
DANIELS**
CORONER-RANGER

*He's The Same
Coming Or Going*



— ELECT —
**MOTEE
DANIELS**
CORONER-RANGER

*Any Way You Look At It
He's The Man For The Job*

always drawn to Motee as someone whose wit and philosophy offered an unforgettable encounter with Southern Culture.

During one such party at Motee's cabin we entertained international visitors from Africa, the Middle East, and Haiti. Dressed in their most elegant attire, the group admired Motee preparing bar-b-que for the dinner and listened to a country music band. My sister, whom Motee had not yet met, was talking with him that evening when he pointed over at me and said "You see that fellow over there. Just to look at him you would think he was nothing but a dumb son of a bitch. But they got him out there running that Southern Culture Center!" It was a compliment that I would always treasure.

Motee divided his life between the worlds of Lafayette County and Oxford. Born in the rural community of Dog Town, he knew poverty and hard work as a child. Each

fall his parents gathered their children, packed their clothes, quilts, and a cook stove, and traveled by train from Oxford to Blytheville, Arkansas, where they picked cotton until December. They returned to Oxford in time to celebrate Christmas. After cotton-picking season Motee attended a county school of which he was intensely proud. He often remarked to me "I got my Ph.D. in Dog Town and it's worth three or four from Yale."

I often visited with Motee at Smitty's Restaurant in the mornings where I would have breakfast while he drank coffee and ate a "cat head" biscuit. He would tell me about his ancestors and their adventures. One uncle sold bedbug medicine to rural families, and when one lady complained it did not work, he asked her how she used it. She said, "I put it in a dish under each leg of the bed."

"That's the problem," he replied. "You got to take the bedbug, hold his nose, and pour it down his

elections he usually predicted winners with ease. He was a familiar figure at the county courthouse where he sat in the audience during trials and offered his philosophy afterward on a bench outside. Seated with his familiar cap, he watched traffic on the Square and knew most of those he greeted by name.

One of the highlights of political life in Lafayette County was when Motee ran for the office of coroner-ranger. During the campaign candidates gathered at the courthouse to deliver their speeches, and Motee appeared with his campaign manager, a talking dog named Buster whom Motee had taught to say "Momma." Buster sported a sign on his back that said "Motee Daniels for Coroner-Ranger. Buster Daniels, Campaign Manager." Both Willie Morris and William Styron helped write Motee's campaign speech, and he asked me to make two photographs of him — one facing the camera and one from the back of his head — for his campaign cards. Then he printed one on each side of his campaign card with the slogans "He's the Same Coming or Going" on the front and "Any Way You Look At It He's The Man For The Job" on the back. While Motee lost the election, his friends remembered it as one of many times he enriched our lives with his wit and humor.

Motee Daniels was fond of saying that he was "the last one in captivity." While his stories of William Faulkner fascinated thousands of visitors to our community, his own life was one of which we should be especially proud. Like so many of his generation, he grew up without the benefits of wealth and education. He worked on road building crews, hauled firewood,



Above: A recent photo of Motee Daniels by William Ferris.

and picked cotton to survive as a young man. Later as a keen businessman, he traded successfully in land, mules, and real estate before retiring. Motee never forgot his roots in Lafayette County, and he was always generous in sharing his time and stories with others.

On several occasions he visited my daughter Virginia's classroom and spoke with students about his memories of life when he was their age. He taught them with a special love and knowledge about the rural schoolhouse he attended that was heated with a wood stove. His lessons in that school were hard ones, and he delighted in sharing them with children.

Over the past twenty years Motee called me on the phone almost every day. He would usually scold me for not calling him more often, then we would talk about the day's events. At the end of our conversation he would want to know when I was coming out to see him and Lucille. Last month he insisted I come out for dinner and

bring my camera. He explained that he had not been feeling well and asked me to make a photo that could run in *The Oxford Eagle* if he died. I told him I would make the photo but was sure he would outlive us all.

Sadly Motee knew better than we that his life was about to end, and he planned his final days with courage. Motee's death left pain in the heart of every person who was privileged to know him. I still look for him as I circle the Square and when I have coffee at Smitty's. His spirit will always hover over this community. He knew and loved this world so deeply, and he left us all the richer for having known him. When we remember you, Motee, we will always smile as we think of a friend whose like we will never meet again.

*William Ferris is the Director of the
Center for Study of Southern Culture
at Ole Miss and a Professor of
Anthropology.*



The
University of Mississippi

Oxford • Jackson • Tupelo • Southaven

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Post-It® Fax Note	7671	Date	7/3	# of pages	14
To	Marcia Scott	From	Scott McLraw		
Co./Dept.		Co. Ctr. for the Study of So. Culture			
Phone #		Phone #	601-232-5993		
Fax #	202-456-5558	Fax #	" " 5814		

July 3, 1997

Dear Ms. Scott,

Enclosed are materials that I hope will be of interest. I look forward to speaking with you next week about the National Endowment for the Humanities.

With very best wishes,

Sincerely,
Bill Ferris

Withdrawal/Redaction Marker

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CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: William R. Ferris

BIRTHPLACE: Vicksburg, Mississippi

NATIONALITY: American

BIRTHDATE: February 5, 1942

HOME ADDRESS: P.O. Box 260, Oxford, Mississippi 38655

TELEPHONE: (601) 232-5993 (Office)
(601) 236-2022 (Home)

SOCIAL SECURITY: (b)(6) [001]

ACADEMIC TRAINING:

Summer Program	Union Theological Seminary (New York)	1963
BA (English Literature)	Davidson College	1964
MA (English Literature)	Northwestern University	1965
One-Year Student	Trinity College (Dublin, Ireland)	1965- 66
MA (Folklore)	University of Pennsylvania	1967
PhD (Folklore)	University of Pennsylvania	1969

Dissertation: "Black Folklore
From the Mississippi Delta"

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

Assistant Professor Department of English	Jackson State University Jackson, Mississippi	1970-72
Associate Professor Afro-American and American Studies Programs	Yale University New Haven, Connecticut	1972-79
Director, Center for of Southern Culture and Professor of Anthropology	University of Mississippi Oxford, Mississippi	1979-Study present
Visiting Fellow	Stanford Humanities Center Stanford University Palo Alto, California	1989-90

BOOKS:

Blues From the Delta, Studio Vista (London, 1970); revised edition, Doubleday (New York, 1978); DaCapo (New York, 1988).

Mississippi Black Folklore: A Research Bibliography and Discography, University Press of Mississippi (Jackson, 1971).

Black Prose Narrative From the Mississippi Delta, published by Jazz Forschung/Jazz Research, Jahrbuch 6/7 (Graz, Austria, 1974-75).

Afro-American Folk Arts and Crafts, special edition of Southern Folklore Quarterly vol. 42, nos. 2 and 3 (1978); revised edition, G.K. Hall & Co. (Boston, 1983); University Press of Mississippi (Jackson, 1986).

American Folklore Films and Videotapes: An Index, Co-Editor with Judy Peiser and Carolyn Lipson, Center for Southern Folklore (Memphis, 1976).

Local Color, With a Foreword by Robert Penn Warren, McGraw-Hill (New York, 1982); Anchor Books/Doubleday (New York, 1992).

Folk Music and Modern Sound, Co-Editor with Sue Hart, University

Press of Mississippi (Jackson, 1982).

Images of the South: Visits With Eudora Welty and Walker Evans,
Center for Southern Folklore (Memphis, 1978).

Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, With a Foreword by Alex Haley,
Co-Editor with Charles Wilson, University of North Carolina
Press (Chapel Hill, 1989); four-volume paperback
(Anchor/Doubleday, 1991).

"You Live and Learn. Then You Die and Forget It All." Ray Lum's
Tales of Horses, Mules and Men, With a Foreword by Eudora Welty,
Anchor Books/Doubleday (New York, 1992).

DOCUMENTARY FILMS:

1969---Mississippi Delta Blues.
Black Delta Religion.

1970---Delta Blues Singer: James "Sonny Ford" Thomas.

1972---Gravel Springs Fife and Drum.

1973---Green Valley Grandparents.

1974---Ray Lum: Mule Trader.
Fanny Bell Chapman: Gospel Singer.

1975---Give My Poor Heart Ease.
Two Black Churches.
I Ain't Lyin'.
Made In Mississippi.

1977---Four Women Artists.

1978---Hush Hoggies Hush.

1983---Painting In the South

Mississippi Blues (Associate Producer; Directed by Bertrand Tavernier and Robert Parrish and featured at Cannes Film Festival)

OTHER:

William Ferris is author of over 100 publications in fields of folklore, American literature, fiction, and photography. He was made a "Chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters" in 1985 and an "Officer in the Order of Arts and Letters" in 1994 by the French government, and in 1995 he was given the Charles Frankel Award by President Bill Clinton. Ferris received a Doctor of Fine Arts from Rhodes College in 1997. He has served as a consultant to The Color Purple, Crossroads, and Heart of Dixie. Ferris has made over 225 presentations to audiences in 14 countries and was named one of the top 10 teachers in the nation by Rolling Stone magazine in 1991.

Dr. William Ferris
Director, Center for the Study of Southern Culture
The University of Mississippi
University, MS 38677

Sample Press Release

Dr. William Ferris, an internationally renowned folklorist and anthropologist who grew up in Vicksburg, Mississippi, is director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at The University of Mississippi.

Ferris, who has been called the South's most inclusive biographer, champions all of society in his quest to preserve every thread of culture that has woven the South into what he considers to be the dominating influence on Western culture.

"The South is the image of Huckleberry Finn and Jim -- black and white figures dependent on each other for survival," Ferris said. "The South is where the two great cultural streams from Africa and Europe converge."

As a young boy growing up in Vicksburg, Ferris was fascinated by the sounds of musical instruments and singing as well as the spoken word. That early interest sparked a life-long passion and career.

Educated at Davidson College, Northwestern University, and the University of Pennsylvania, Ferris taught for seven years at Yale before coming to head the Center at the University of Mississippi.

Under his direction since 1979, the Center has gained international prominence as a source of information on the South. Perhaps most important to the Center's sustained success, is the University's Southern Studies program, which attracts students and scholars from around the world. The Center offers both B.A. and M.A. degrees in Southern Studies through its pioneering curriculum, composed of more than 40 courses taught by faculty from 10 departments in the College of Liberal Arts. In 1991, Ferris was named as one of the top ten professors in the country by *Rolling Stone* magazine.

The Center's annual conference on the works of writer William Faulkner, now in its 23rd year, attracts international lecturers and scholars. The Oxford Conference for the Book, held each April, has become an annual international event. Ferris codirected in 1995 the first International Conference on Elvis Presley. "In Search of Elvis" drew participants and media coverage from around the world.

In addition to producing books, films, videotapes, and records, the Center publishes two national magazines *Living Blues* and *Reckon: The Magazine of Southern Culture*. *Living Blues* celebrated its 25th anniversary of publication in 1995 and has been honored with the Ozzie Award for best magazine re-design.

As director of the Center, one of Ferris' missions is to help incorporate blues music in school curriculums. In 1995, Ferris directed a blues seminar through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, a week-long blues institute with the House of Blues Foundation, and several teacher institutes focusing on the culture and music of the South.

A highlight of Ferris' work at the Center has been the 1989 publication of the widely acclaimed *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, which he co-edited with Charles Wilson. The 1,634-page reference book includes contributions by over 800 writers of both scholarly and lighthearted entries on everything Southern, from agriculture to zydeco. More than 100,000 copies have been sold, and the book has garnered major awards as well as a nomination for a Pulitzer Prize.

Ferris' book, *You Live and Learn. Then You Die and Forget It All: Ray Lum's Tales of Horses, Mules and Men*, published in 1992, is a compilation of tales told by Ray Lum, a mule trader/story teller Ferris grew up with in Vicksburg. He is the author of six books and many articles on folklore.

Among the many awards Ferris has won are two presentations from the French government, Chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters and Officer in the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government. In October of 1995, Ferris was presented the Charles Frankel Prize by President Bill Clinton for the National Endowment for the Humanities. That same month, he accepted with Ann Abadie of the Center and architect Thomas Howorth, an Honor Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation for the restoration of Barnard Observatory and the work of the Center.

A passage from William Faulkner's work *Absalom, Absalom!* guides the overall mission of Bill Ferris and the Ole Miss Center: "Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all."



The University of Mississippi

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June 13, 1996

Sheldon Hackney, Chairman
National Endowment for the Humanities
Washington, DC 20506

Dear Sheldon,

Thanks very much for your nice letter and enclosures of April 8. I was very sorry that my schedule did not allow me to attend your "Envisioning Our Future" meeting on March 8. Many of the group you gathered are old friends, and I was pleased to read their comments and suggestions in the materials you enclosed with your letter.

In reading the summary of your discussions, I felt the comments echoed many of my thoughts about the Endowment, and I would like to explore some of these ideas with you. I feel that as a general principle, the Endowment should build on its proven strengths, and that it should seek to fund institutions with clear records in the educational areas for which they are funded. As your discussants noted, the Endowment has consistently funded research and scholarship areas that have made major contributions to our nation. Many of these areas--such as publications and films--are detailed in the notes from your meeting.

Just as you have clearly defined areas where your education and research projects have succeeded for decades, you might also identify institutions throughout the nation that have established records of achievement in areas where support from the Endowment will have maximum impact. You might consider opening conversations with such institutions throughout the nation to identify projects of mutual interest to both those institutions and the Endowment. Such projects would combine both scholarly and public appeal. Once identified, these projects could then be nurtured and developed over an extended period of time, somewhat like your impressive editing projects on historic American figures like Benjamin Franklin. In this way high profile projects at important institutions throughout the nation will bear the Endowment's name and will draw important public recognition and support to your institution over an extended period of time. For example, a decade-long support with appropriate review periods would allow for a different and more public relationship to develop between the Endowment and the institutions it supports.

This plan would also allow both the Endowment and these institutions to build important partnerships with corporate groups throughout the nation. Corporate groups could be enlisted to support specific projects, and they could also be involved in providing support for overall needs of the Endowment itself. One model that you might consider is the National Park Service's board which is currently chaired by Mort Meyerson, Chairman and CEO of Perot Enterprises. As director of the National Park Service, Roger Kennedy has identified corporate partners through this board, and a similar board could be enlisted on behalf of the Endowment. Members of the Endowment's board could be drawn from the world of publishers, media, and public relations.

Sheldon Hackney
June 13, 1996
Page 2

Several names of friends come to mind that would probably be interested in working with you. Robert Pittman (creator of MTV), Harold Burson (head of Burson-Marsteller advertising company), and Gene Dattel (formerly with Solomon Brothers) are all very interested in education and would bring significant corporate resources to such a board should you pursue the idea. I will be pleased to give you their addresses and phones if you want them.

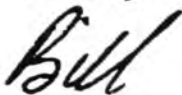
Several of your discussants suggested that the Endowment explore the field of cultural tourism. Significant relationships between educational institutions and the tourism industry are rapidly developing, and these relationships offer a new frontier for educating the public that also enriches our classrooms. I recently spent three days with Roger Kennedy, National Park Service staff, and scholars in Memphis to shape plans for cultural tourism in the Mississippi Delta. Our Center is also working with the Smithsonian Institution to assist with their plans for a major festival that will feature the Mississippi Delta both on the Mall in Washington and at a location in the Delta. Our Center's growing work with cultural tourism is outlined in the enclosed copy of a talk I gave earlier this year at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco. (Because the date of the talk conflicted with your "Envisioning Our Future" meeting, I was unable to join you in Washington for your discussions.) Enclosed also is a revised version of the Commonwealth Club talk that focuses on our Center's work with cultural tourism in the Mississippi Delta. This latter version will be published in Museum News later this summer.

Finally, I encourage you to pursue the suggestion of discussants that annual awards for teaching, scholarship, and other areas supported by the Endowment be held in Washington each year. With support from one or more corporate sponsors, these awards will provide high profile recognition of the Endowment. Hardly a day passes that people do not mention that they saw or read about my Frankel Award, and these other awards would bring similar recognition and good will to the Endowment.

You and your staff should be congratulated on the great work you do at the Endowment. This work has a long, distinguished history, and you should continue to support the priorities of education and scholarship which are your mission. You should also, as you are doing, explore new ways of achieving these goals that will further strengthen your work and that of educational institutions throughout the nation. America's academic community strongly believes in and depends on the Endowment to enrich and deepen its educational mission.

I hope these thoughts will be of help and want to assist you in any way you feel appropriate. Please let me know if I can be of further support.

Sincerely,


William Ferris
Director

Enclosures

Q/A Grandall *continued*

been able to fly from our hubs in the U.S. non-stop to the principle cities in Asia. There isn't an airplane that will fly that far. Boeing is now talking about building, and we are thinking about buying, airplanes that will fly from 8000 to 8500 miles. This means we could fly non-stop from Dallas-Fort Worth to Hong Kong, or from Miami to Tokyo. This would give us a lot of competitive flexibility and offer our customers a new and better way to get to some of the places they are going. We spent a lot of capital in the 1980s. We have a very young fleet relative to most of our competitors. Sometime in the next two or three years we'll be making some choices about long-range airplanes which we hope will allow us to bring new and exciting products.

Q. I experienced American Eagle prop plane service on a recent trip to Oklahoma City, and I felt like I was returning to the 1960s. Will jet service be available in the future?

A. Our business is like any other business. We've got some products where costs are higher than could be recaptured in revenue. The airline business is an expensive business. We are a long established company with strong unions and senior employees. One of the things we cannot do is fly relatively short routes with large jet airplanes. American Eagle operates commuter aircraft that are propeller-driven turboprop airplanes. They are very good airplanes. They are similar in size to the DC-3, but a whole lot quieter, safer, and better. Everyone prefers jets. Companies are starting to manufacture small 50-seat jets that can be flown by some of the commuter airlines. We are looking at those for the American Eagle. ♦

CLUB TABLE—A special table is available at all Commonwealth Club luncheons for members who are attending the program alone. This table is identified by a sign reading "Club Table."

THURSDAY MARCH 7

An American Sense of Place

William Ferris, Ph.D.

*Director, Center for the Study of Southern Culture,
University of Mississippi*

No Southerner speaks about his region without mentioning family. Black and white Southerners are, in fact, a single extended family, a network of people who teach and support each other, as they did me. I grew up on a farm outside of Vicksburg, Mississippi. My first teachers were the black and white families. The first Sunday of each month I spent at Rose Hill Church, where black families have continually worshipped since before the Civil War. There were no hymnals in the pews. Each generation learned to sing their hymns from previous generations. After church, a communal lunch of fried chicken, biscuits, and iced tea was served upon the lawn.

At the age of five, I entered Jefferson Davis Academy, a public school that, like all public schools in Mississippi at that time, was segregated. Each teacher taught two grades. I was the only student in the school whose parents had attended college. In the sixth grade our teacher asked which students planned to go to college, and I refused to raise my hand, knowing that none of my fellow students would go.

Our teacher, Mrs. Barfield, pointed at me and said, "Billy Ferris, you will go to college. Your parents will make you go." With every eye in the class looking at me, I replied, "I ain't going to no college." As she had predicted, I did go: first to Brooks School in Massachusetts, then to Davidson College, Northwestern Univer-



William Ferris

sity, Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, and finally, to the University of Pennsylvania where I received a Ph.D. in folklore.

Love of Land

As director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, I have learned that my understanding of the world will

always be grounded — in those early lessons. This relationship, which Eudora Welty calls the "sense of place," shapes each of us in deep and lasting ways. In 1966 I spent a year studying James Joyce at Trinity College in Ireland, and while there, I was struck by the many parallels I found between the Irish

culture and that of the American South. Irish and Southern people both have a deep attachment to their community, to family, and to religion.

I remember once a wealthy Texas rancher visited Ireland. He saw a farmer on the side of the road, and said, "Howdy, Buddy. I'm from Texas. Would you mind talking to me about your farm?" The Irishman's face lit up, and he replied, "Tis a gorgeous piece of land, isn't it?" The Texan said, "It's lovely, my friend. But let me tell you about my place

"Southerners in each generation have fallen in love with and hated with a passion the places in which they live."

Continued on page 12

Dinner at Seven



San Mateo's popular new hot spot, Barley & Hopps, is a one-stop entertainment center, combining a great microbrewery, outstanding restaurant, Chicago-style blues club, and a game room featuring billiards, shuffle board and darts.

Our menu includes choice of appetizer (smoked chicken wings, deep-fried calamari or caesar salad); entree (smokehouse ribs, pecan-smoked half chicken, or vegetarian pasta); dessert (chocolate fudge brownie or warm apple walnut crisp, both served with delicious vanilla bean ice cream); and a glass of beer or wine.

For good food, blues and games, get your reservation in today!

THURSDAY MAY 30

6 p.m., No-host cocktails

7 p.m., Dinner

Barley & Hopps

201 South B Street (at 2nd Street)

San Mateo

\$33 for members; \$38 for guests.

Call Club office for reservations,
415/597-6705.

Ferris continued

out in West Texas. I get up in the morning before the sun rises, and when the sun sets, I haven't even gotten to the second corner of my place." The Irishman scratched his head and said, "You know, I had a car like that myself once." We can all appreciate the Irishman's point. It is not the piece of land so much as our interaction with it that matters.

Southerners in each generation have fallen in love with and hated with a passion the places in which they live. They have written about these places. They have sung about them. They have painted them. They help us understand what William Faulkner meant by his "little postage stamp of native soil." Each of you carries within yourself a "postage stamp of native soil," a sense of place that defines you. I ask you to take a moment and recall where you were happiest in your life. You probably remember a time in your childhood, perhaps with extended family members, and this memory is set in a special place. It is to this place that you travel in your memory for shelter. It is the memory of this place that nurtures you with identity and special strength.

Confluence of Cultures

My home town of Vicksburg, Mississippi, is a community on the Mississippi River where Jewish, Lebanese, Chinese, Irish, Italian, Greek, and many other ethnic families have lived for over a century. My father loved to play poker at the home of Shouphie Habeeb, a Lebanese friend. Vicksburg was also the home of the late Bishop Joseph Brunini, whose father was an Italian Catholic and his mother Jewish. My wife, Marcie Cohen Ferris, grew up as a Jewish Southerner in the Arkansas Delta town of Blytheville. As the first director of the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in Utica, Mississippi, Marcie worked with Southern families who greeted each other, saying, "Shalom, y'all." Shelby Foote, whose grandmother was Jewish, recalls the

ethnic diversity of his hometown, Greenville, Mississippi. "There were 50 Chinese stores in Greenville when it had fewer than 15,000 people," he said. They are bragging about moonlight and magnolias and pure blood lines. It's all foolishness. It's the exact opposite."

The Center for the Study of Southern Culture believes that these places, memories, and values are essential to life and should not be abandoned in the name of progress. Our most enduring lessons come between the ages of three and eight, and we must learn to understand how our lives are embedded in our families and communities.

As expatriates living in San Francisco, Paris, and New York, respectively, Alice Walker, Richard Wright, and Tennessee Williams each wrote with mixed feelings about their roots in the South. San Francisco architect William Turnbull

visited his ancestral home in Tennessee as a child and later drew on it as inspiration for houses he designed in Hawaii, California, and Oregon. Unlike San Francisco, where the first question a stranger will ask me is "What do you do?" in the South, the first question will predictably be, "Where are you from?"

Sense of Place

This sense of place does not Balkanize us by region or by caste, class, or gender. It bonds us as Americans. America is indebted to Southerners like Thomas Jefferson for their contribution to the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, and each generation of Southerners has reaffirmed the American institutions of family, religion, and patriotism. But the South was also the site of the most un-American institution, slavery. During the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, unpardonable racial intolerance and violence were common in the South. The South in many ways is like a Third World culture where poverty and illiteracy are juxtaposed with great wealth.

Continued on page 13

**"The birth of rock
'n' roll reflects
the beginning of
the civil rights
movement in the
South."**

Ferris *continued*

It is a world where past and present coexist. Faulkner once remarked that, in the South, "The past is never dead. It is not even past."

Through our memory of slavery, the Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement, Southern ancestral worlds are alive and well. Yet the same Southerners who share a common reverence for their past also share an optimism about the future, as they integrate sophisticated technology within the region's cutting-edge corporations like Coca-Cola, Holiday Inn, WalMart, Federal Express, and CNN. In *The Economist*, John Peet explored the South as a key to the American experience in a lengthy article titled "The American South: For Whom the Belle Tolls." Michael Lind argues in a recent issue of the *New Republic* that American politics today are best understood as the "Southernizing of America." Our president and vice president and many of our most powerful congressional voices in both parties are from the South.

Perfect Paradigm

When one considers the South, we find a model for studying the nation, for the issues of Southern history and culture reflect a broader American experience. Look at the issue of race, for example. Many expect a Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi to glorify moonlight and magnolias. Instead, its focus is upon those who have been omitted from Southern history—blacks, poor whites, and women.

Our work is designed to heal the historic wounds of race, class, and gender. Our curriculum deals with racial issues in a region that celebrates the birthday of Martin Luther King and Robert E. Lee. Our students talk together about their ancestors, black and white, who were slaves and slave owners. Last summer our first Southern Studies Teacher Institute drew participants from Los Angeles, Boston, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Delta.

What does our work at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture have to do with the rest of the country? We have a message for the heart of every adult and

child. This is our 10-point lesson plan for America: First, we must view the arts as a means of preserving and celebrating American culture. Our writers, musicians, and painters help us see ourselves clearly and honestly through their work. We ignore or attack artists at our own peril, for their contributions to society will endure long after most politicians are forgotten. Second, we must discuss race, ethnicity, class, and gender openly within the classroom. We must use education to heal old wounds by teaching our students that America's diversity is her greatest strength.

Historic Preservation

Third, we must commit ourselves to historic preservation. Each of us can remember a historic building that has been torn down in our community. We know of others that are endangered. We are connected to these buildings, and their destruction diminishes our lives immeasurably. Fourth, we must establish oral history projects in every American community. I often quote an African proverb that says, "When an old man dies, a library burns to the ground." If we tape a single hour of conversation with a grandparent, what a legacy their voice will be for the grandchildren. Fifth, we must encourage our students to be writers, historians, and teachers.

Sixth, we must help our teachers. Primary and secondary school teachers desperately need the support that our center offers through summer institutes that provide teachers with resources that enrich their classroom curriculum. Seventh, we must rebuild our inner cities by celebrating their history and culture.

In my home town of Vicksburg, Mississippi, the Center for the Study of Southern Culture worked with community leaders to save an entire city block of buildings, some over 150 years old, that were erected by the Sisters of Mercy. Their St. Francis School is being renovated as a Southern Culture Center that houses a performance center and a museum in which the black, white, and ethnic traditions of Vicksburg are celebrated. Eighth, we must strengthen

our nation's resources for cultural tourism.

Living History

Tourism is second only to health care as America's leading industry. Our richest cultural attractions are often in economically depressed areas. Our center is developing a corridor of cultural tourism that extends along the Mississippi River from Memphis to New Orleans, from Beale Street to Bourbon Street. While the Mississippi Delta's economy is among the poorest in our nation, its cultural resources include Native American, Civil War, Civil Rights, literary, and blues worlds that draw thousands of visitors each year. We are working with communities in the Delta to build an infrastructure of museums and cultural centers that interpret the region's culture for tourists and also serve as educational resources for local schools. History and culture can do for the Mississippi Delta and other regions what wine and food have done for the Napa Valley.

Ninth, we must open the doors and windows of academia and reach out to the public. The model of the university as an "ivory tower" is not rooted in the American experience. It is inappropriate for our times. Our center has embraced public audiences since its inception with a broad range of programs that include our quarterly newsletter, *The Southern Register*, and the magazines *Living Blues* and *Reckon: The Magazine of Southern Culture*. Our "College on the Mississippi," an annual week-long trip aboard the Delta Queen, has featured speakers and performers such as Alex Haley, B. B. King, Shelby Foote, and William Styron. Our annual symposia feature William Faulkner, Southern history, the book, and most recently Elvis Presley, and we produce films, records, and radio programs. Each Saturday night we present "Highway 61," a two-hour blues show that is broadcast throughout the Deep South on public radio in Mississippi.

Tenth, we must bond each of our generations together in this effort. Our problems in the South are no different than those anywhere. The challenges that

Continued on page 14

Ferris *continued*

America faces are no different from those of other nations. Our center was made a member of the United Nations Non-Governmental Organization, because the center's work is seen as a model for similar institutions in Russia, Africa, and Australia. In a recent *New York Times* article Judith Miller laments the diminishing support for the arts in America. Bill Clinton, Bob Dole, and Dan Quayle have all voiced their concern over the impoverishment of American life and values, but no one has found an answer to our problems. The solution lies in the indigenous culture about which Alice Walker wrote, the familiar worlds into which we each are born.

We must study and understand the worlds that make each of us American, and through that journey, we will renew American culture. A cure for the problems of the nation is within our reach. It is simple, and it is close. We must look within ourselves, within our communities, and within our regions to rediscover America. What we do in our communities can become a beacon for the rest of the world. Southerners love family reunions, and I suggest to you that this approach to America's future is a family affair. As an elder in this family, I invite you to join hands with me to build a stronger, more compassionate future for all people. ♦

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

What do you think about what our speakers have to say?

We encourage members to share their opinions. Letters are subject to condensation. All letters must be signed and include a daytime telephone number and mailing address.

Send letters to:

Member Feedback,
The Commonwealth Club
595 Market Street
San Francisco, Ca 94105
Fax: 415/597-6729

Q & A / WILLIAM FERRIS**Answers to Written Questions from the Floor:**

Q. We now have a southern president, vice-president, and Speaker of the House. Hasn't the southern political tradition begun to dominate federal politics?

A. This question is always two-edged. Are we southernizing America, or Americanizing the South? President Clinton is a good example of the new South. He is southern-bred, but has been educated at Yale and Oxford. He represents a global vision as well as having deep roots in Arkansas and the South. This, like the time of Thomas Jefferson, reflects the special relationship between America and the South.

Q. What effect is the conservative southern constituency having on the American political dialogue?

A. The movement of the old guard, yellow-dog Democrats, who refused to vote anything but party-line Democrat, to the Republican Party is connected to the issue of race. The democratic leadership in the South is in the process of re-evaluating the party. If we understand the South, then we understand the nation's political process. This goes back to the very beginning of our nation-state with Jefferson and other southerners writing the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

Q. Why have all our great American authors come from the South?

A. In the South we have two great oral traditions; one from Europe and one from Africa. We have storytelling, music, and art. Any culture that produces writers has to have a folk tradition. Writers write what they hear. This is similar to James Joyce, Yeats, and other Irish writers, who drew on the great oral traditions of their culture.

Q. Are there any southern gothic writers left?

A. Southern gothic and the frontier experience will always be a part of southern fiction. Contemporary writers, such as Larry Brown, live in Oxford and draw on the great tradition. Southern

Gothic has provided the story line for many of the great films and television concepts that have come out of Hollywood, including *Gone With the Wind*, *The Color Purple*, and *Driving Miss Daisy*.

Q. Does popular music express the allure of a regional culture?

A. Absolutely. The music of California, and especially San Francisco, in the 1960s was a window on the California experience. In the South we had an overabundance of music. The birth of rock 'n' roll, borrowing from both black and white music, reflects the beginning of the civil rights movement in the South. Elvis Presley drew from his roots in white country and the gospel of northeastern Mississippi and linked that with the blues and black gospel he discovered on Beale Street. This in itself tells us about the culture in a profound and special way.

Q. What part does regional humor play?

A. Southerners have and love the gift of the gab. Southerners express themselves in a mythic story-telling way as opposed to a more didactic fact related way, as they do in the Northeast.

Q. How are education, the economy, and race relations in Mississippi?

A. Mississippi is fascinating. In many ways it is the heart of the South. If things change in Mississippi change has truly come to the South. There are more black elected officials in Mississippi than any other state in the nation. This profound change in the state is a barometer of what's to come in other parts of the region and nation. Mississippi is also a climate for genius. The poorest state in the nation produces the greatest riches in music and literature.

Q. What can be done to put aside the negative stereotype of racism and the legacy of the KKK?

A. Someone described racism as cancer in remission. It will always be with us in some form. We are conducting an experiment in this nation and the world. It's an experiment in equal rights, justice, and liberty for all people. The best way to achieve this is to celebrate diversity. This

Continued on page 15

Q/A Ferris *continued*

celebration will move all the way from kindergarten to senior citizens. Given the quality of educational resources and technology, we can move beyond racism.

Q. What are your thoughts on the current political drive to cut funds for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)?

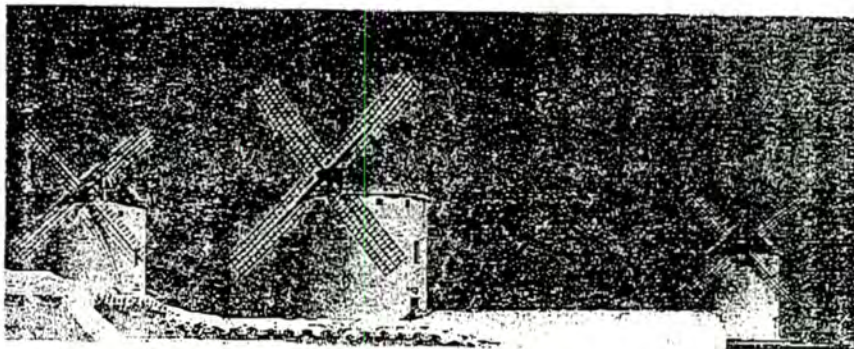
A. Cultural groups and the endowments are a modest part of our national budget. When we attack the arts, we attack the heart of our culture. People look to America primarily for our artists, writers, and musicians. If we attack them, it's as if we're killing our life blood. What the endowments have done over the last few decades is to celebrate American history and culture. If we can't be proud and support our own culture, then our children and grandchildren will face a bleak future.

Q. What are you plans for tourism?

A. We are partners with the National Park Service, the Smithsonian Institution, and tourism groups in various states to build an agenda. There is an increasing number of Americans and foreigners hungry to see the locations where writers lived and where historic moments were set. Often, when they go to these places, there is nothing. There is no institution to present the attraction in a thoughtful effective way. While this agenda is educational and cultural, it is also economic. The greatest attractions are often in the poorest communities. For example, the Mountainview Ozark Folk Center in Mountainview, Arkansas, one of the poorest counties in the nation, has a booming multi-million dollar economy based on the history of artists and musicians. The culture itself, with a platform of a museum, has drawn millions of people over the years. A version of this can happen in every part of our nation.

Q. How do we find out more about the publications, events, and activities offered by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture?

A. Simply write: Southern Culture, University of Mississippi, Mississippi 38677.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

July 21, 1997

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

**FROM: BOB NASH, DIRECTOR OF PRESIDENTIAL PERSONNEL
ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT**

SUBJECT: CHAIR, NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

I. BACKGROUND

The National Endowment for the Humanities is an independent federal agency headed by a chair appointed by the President. The founding of the agency as an independent body with term appointments, its authorizing legislation, its strong traditions and practice of peer review, and its standing the scholarly community all require a reasoned and apolitical agency.

II. DISCUSSION

The agency requires a person of great wisdom, as well as intellect, with a strong ethical sense -- a leader characterized by an ability to engage in continuing meaningful dialogue with the diverse constituencies that the agency is mandated to serve. The Chair should also possess substantial skills as an administrator, ready to lead and inspire the excellent staff of the Endowment, yet open to innovation and change.

The Chair should follow the philosophy established by the former Chair, Dr. Sheldon Hackney: an understanding that at this critical juncture in history the benefits of the humanities are exceptionally important. The new Chair must continue to call for a national discussion on what unites us as a country - the common American values that we possess even though our nation comprised of so many diverse groups.

Because of the political volatility of humanities issues, the Chair should also be a person with strong personal loyalty to the President and the Administration, ever mindful of the ways which decisions made by the Chair of the Humanities Endowment can hurt but also can help the President's ability to lead the nation successfully.

The purpose of this memorandum is to make a recommendation to you on the nomination of a candidate for Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Withdrawal/Redaction Marker

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DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
002. memo	Bob Nash to the President [partial] (1 page)	07/21/1997	b(6)

COLLECTION:

Clinton Presidential Records
First Lady's Office
Melanne Verveer
OA/Box Number: 23253

FOLDER TITLE:

Bill Ferris NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] Chair Candidate

2013-0534-S

rc1514

RESTRICTION CODES

Presidential Records Act - [44 U.S.C. 2204(a)]

- P1 National Security Classified Information [(a)(1) of the PRA]
- P2 Relating to the appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA]
- P3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(a)(3) of the PRA]
- P4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(a)(4) of the PRA]
- P5 Release would disclose confidential advice between the President and his advisors, or between such advisors [(a)(5) of the PRA]
- P6 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(a)(6) of the PRA]

C. Closed in accordance with restrictions contained in donor's deed of gift.

PRM. Personal record misfile defined in accordance with 44 U.S.C. 2201(3).

RR. Document will be reviewed upon request.

Freedom of Information Act - [5 U.S.C. 552(b)]

- b(1) National security classified information [(b)(1) of the FOIA]
- b(2) Release would disclose internal personnel rules and practices of an agency [(b)(2) of the FOIA]
- b(3) Release would violate a Federal statute [(b)(3) of the FOIA]
- b(4) Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential or financial information [(b)(4) of the FOIA]
- b(6) Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(b)(6) of the FOIA]
- b(7) Release would disclose information compiled for law enforcement purposes [(b)(7) of the FOIA]
- b(8) Release would disclose information concerning the regulation of financial institutions [(b)(8) of the FOIA]
- b(9) Release would disclose geological or geophysical information concerning wells [(b)(9) of the FOIA]

III. RECOMMENDATION

I recommend that you approve the either of the following individuals to be the Chairman of National of Endowment of the Humanities:

Dr. Bill Ferris, Democrat of Mississippi, is currently the Director of the Center of Southern Culture and a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Mississippi at Oxford. He is the author of over 100 publications including 10 books. He taught in the Afro-American and American Studies at Yale in the 1970's with Joe Duffey. Since 1979 he has served as director of the Center for Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi where he has displayed his innovation and creativity holding conferences on southern culture from Faulkner to Elvis. Dr. Ferris enjoys a national reputation as a premier scholar on American culture and folklore. He has a broad academic base that gives him great credibility in all academic circles related to the humanities. In 1995, you gave him the Charles Frankel Award for the Humanities. Rolling Stone magazine named him one of the Top 10 teachers in the country in 1991. Dr. Ferris has been in agreement and consulted with the direction Sheldon Hackney, current chair of the NEH, has taken the Endowment. He got his B.A. from Davidson College and his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1969.

Sponsors: Sheldon Hackney, Chairman of the NEH, Ellen Lovell and Melanie Verveer; Office of the First Lady, Joe Duffey, Senator Trent Lott, Senator Thad Cochran, OPP

Approve: _____

Disapprove: _____

IV. OTHERS CONSIDERED



(b)(6)

[002]



July 14, 1997

Ms. Melanne Verveer
Chief of Staff
Office of The First Lady
The White House

Dear Melanne:

I have had calls from several persons being considered for nomination as Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). I have known one person for more than twenty-five years and believe he would make an excellent choice for this Administration. After speaking last week with Marsha about the search, I thought I would convey my impressions to you about Bill Ferris, founder and now Director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi.

Bill and I served together on the faculty at Yale University in the early 1970's. At the request of some of our students, together we organized and taught together a course on "The Culture of Appalachia." The seminar was repeated for several years and a number of our students are today in major leadership roles in education, medicine and government. Henry Louis Gates was one of the first students in the course. He has described the course as a seminar on "getting a life."

At NEH, I watched Bill Ferris plan and build the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, launch the Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, build a new appreciation of William Faulkner's literature, and gain the respect of UNESCO representatives and universities across the world for a scholarly approach to regional studies that retained intellectual integrity and avoided "political correctness" and provincialism. Bill is at home in several media--the written word, film, music--and has earned a reputation for sound scholarship. I once introduced him to a group "as much at home in Oxford, England as in Oxford, Mississippi."

My days at the NEH (now nearly two decades ago) were marked by the early squabbles over "elitism" and "excellence," the longstanding but now faded Northeastern scorn of the "South," and controversies over the legitimacy of regional and "folk culture" studies. These battles are now mainly echos of another time.

Ms. Melanne Verveer
July 14, 1997
Page Two

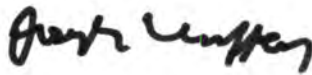
I think Bill Ferris has the qualities to give the NEH strong and effective leadership. He has a quiet manner and a modest unassuming way coupled with a spirit of determination that wins friends and admirers in any encounter. Bill clearly has demonstrated the ability to organize an institution and administer it effectively without becoming mired in organizational bureaucracy. I have long admired his calm but assured and effective leadership of those he works with. I know from visits with his associates that he understands what it means to work as a team.

Frankly, I believe that Bill Ferris would be an appointee who would earn respect and make a statement about the Clinton Administration's understanding that the humanities and humanity may indeed have something in common. I hope he will receive serious consideration.

It looks as though the First Lady had a very successful trip. Our reports from the many USIS people who were involved, including a number who were detailed to new locations for support, were all full of praise and admiration--a joy for a Director to read! (See enclosure.)

Warmest wishes,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph Duffey".

Joseph Duffey

Enclosure

cc: Marsha Scott