

South Carolina Primary Colors: Black and White?

White Sheets and Black Votes: The South Carolina You Won't See on CNN

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South Carolina 2000: Six hundred police in riot gear facing a few dozen angry-as-hell workers on the docks of Charleston. In the darkness, rocks, clubs and blood fly. The cops beat the crap out of the protesters. Of course, it's the union men who are arrested for conspiracy to riot. And of course, of the five men handcuffed, four are Black. The prosecutor: a White, Bible-thumping Attorney General running for Governor. The result: a state ripped in half - White versus Black.

South Carolina 2008: On Saturday, the Palmetto State may well choose our President, or at least the Democrat's idea of a President. According to CNN and the pundit-ocracy, the only question is, Will the large Black population vote their pride (for Obama) or for "experience" (Hillary)? In other words, the election comes down to a matter of racial vanity.

The story of the dockworkers charged with rioting in 2000 suggest there's an awfully good reason for Black folk to vote for one of their own. This is the chance to even the historic score in this land of lingering Jim Crow where the Confederate Flag flew over the capital while the longshoreman faced Southern justice.

But maybe there's more to South Carolina's story than Black and White.

Let's re-wind the tape of the 2000 battle between cops and Black men. It was early that morning on the 19th of January when members of International Longshoremen's Association Local 1422 "shaped up" to unload a container ship which had just pulled into port. It was hard work for good pay. An experienced union man could earn above \$60,000 a year.

In this last hold-out of the Confederacy, it was one of the few places a Black man could get decent pay. Or any man.

That day, the stevedoring contractor handling the unloading decided it would hire the beggars down the dock, without experience or skills - and without union cards - willing to work for just one-third of union scale.

That night, union workers - Black, White, Whatever - fought for their lives and livelihoods.

At the heart of the turmoil in South Carolina in 2000 then, was not so much Black versus White, but union versus non-union. It was a battle between those looking for a good day's pay versus those looking for a way not to pay it. The issue was - and is - class war, the conflict between the movers and the shakers and the moved and shaken.

The dockworkers of Charleston could see the future of America right down the road.

Literally. Because right down the highway, they could see their cousins and brothers who worked in the Carolina textile mills kiss their jobs goodbye as they loaded the mill looms onto trains for Mexico.

The President, Bill Clinton, had signed NAFTA, made China a “most favored nation” in trade and urged us, with a flirtatious grin, to “make change our friend.”

But “change,” apparently, wasn’t in a friendly mood. In 2000, Guilford Mills shuttered its Greensboro, Carolina, fabric plant and reopened it in Tampico, Mexico. Four-hundred jobs went south. Springs Mills of Rock Hill, SC, closed down and abandoned 480 workers. Fieldcrest-Cannon pulled out of York, SC, and Great America Mills simply went bust.

South Carolina, then, is the story of globalization left out of Thomas Friedman’s wonders-of-the-free-market fantasies.

This week, while US media broadcasts cute-sy photo-ops from Black churches and replay the forgettable spats between candidates, the real issues of South Carolina are, thankfully, laid out in a book released today: *On the Global Waterfront*, by Suzan Erem and E. Paul Durrenberger.

Erem and Durrenberger portray the case of the Charleston Five dockworkers as an exemplary, desperate act of economic resistance.

Thomas Friedman’s bestseller, *The World is Flat*, begins with his uplifting game of golf with a tycoon in India. Erem and Durrenberger never put on golf shoes: their book is globalization stripped down to its dirty underpants.

While Friedman made the point that he flew business class to Bangalore on his way to the greens to meet his millionaire, *Global Waterfront*’s authors go steerage class. And the people they write about don’t go anywhere at all. These are the stevedores who move the containers of Wal-Mart T-shirts from Guatemala to sell to customers in Virginia who can’t afford health insurance because they lost their job in the textile mill.

And the book talks about (cover the children’s ears!) – labor unions.

South Carolina is union country. And union-busting country. But who gives a flying fart about labor unions today? Only 7%, one in fourteen US workers belongs to one. That’s less than the number of Americans who believe that Elvis killed John Kennedy.

Think “longshoremen” and what comes to mind is *On the Waterfront* with Marlon Brando, the good guy, beating up the evil union boss. The union bosses were the thugs, mobbed-up bullies, the dockworkers’ enemies. The movie’s director, Stanley Kramer, perfectly picked up the anti-union red-baiting Joe McCarthy zeitgeist of that era of – which could go down well today.

Elected labor leaders are, in our media, always “union bosses.” But the real bosses, the CEOs, the guys who shutter factories and ship them to China ... they’re never “bosses,” they’re “entrepreneurs.”

Indeed, the late and lionized King of Union Busters, Sam Walton, would be proud today, were he alive, to learn that the woman he called, “my little lady,” Hillary Clinton, whom he placed on Wal-Mart’s Board of Directors, is front-runner for the presidency. She could well

become America's "Greeter," posted at our nation's door, to welcome the Saudis and Chinese who are buying America at a guaranteed low price.

So what happened those five union men charged felonious rioting in 2000? Through an international union campaign, they won back their freedom – and their union jobs – after the dockworkers of Spain, the true heroes of globalization, refused to unload the South Carolina scab cargoes.

Erem and Durrenberger ask themselves why they were so drawn to a story of five Carolina cargo-handlers put in prison a decade ago. Maybe it's because the Charleston Five show how courage and heart and solidarity can lead to victory in the midst of a mad march into globalization that threatens to turn us all into the Wal-Mart Five Billion.

See video of the dockworkers' uprising and read more from the book, *On the Global Waterfront*, by Suzan Erem and E. Paul Durrenberger (introduction by Greg Palast) at <http://www.ontheglobalwaterfront.org/>.

Greg Palast is the author of the NY Times best-sellers, Armed Madhouse and The Best Democracy Money Can Buy. View Palast's investigative reports for BBC Television on our [YouTube Channel](#) (Link).

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