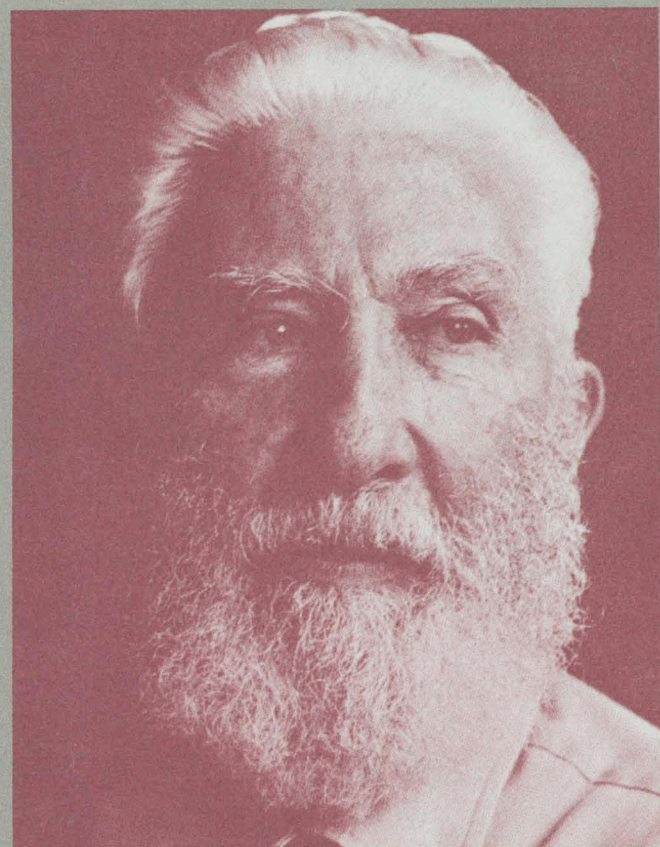


BROADSIDE RECORDS BR 470

JOHN BEECHER

READ BY THE POET



To Live and Die in Dixie

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MUSIC LP

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BROADSIDE RECORDS BR 470

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN HOWARD GRIFFIN

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JOHN BEECHER

To Live and Die in Dixie

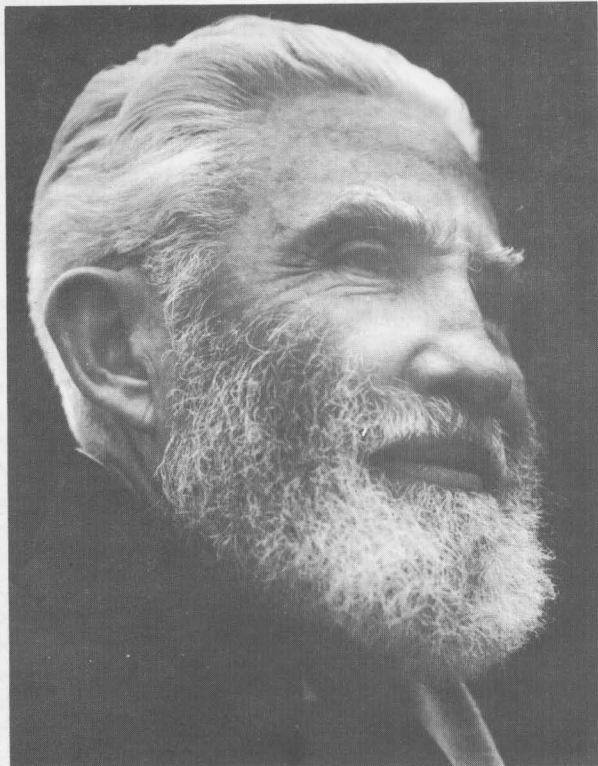
BROADSIDE RECORDS BR 470

701 Seventh Ave., New York, New York 10036

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TO LIVE AND DIE IN DIXIE

JOHN BEECHER



BIOGRAPHY

John Beecher blends a Yankee ancestry with a Deep South upbringing. Although a great-great-nephew of Abolitionists Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, he was raised in Alabama. In his cultural formation Uncle Tom's Cabin, which his grandmother read aloud to him when he was four, fused with the blues and spirituals of the black people around him. At 16 he was working twelve-hour shifts on the open hearth furnaces

in a Birmingham steel mill. All this confirmed him early as a rebel and a poet.

He attended Virginia Military Institute, the University of Alabama and Cornell. He was a graduate student at Harvard, the Sorbonne and the University of North Carolina. He has taught literature, sociology and creative writing at Dartmouth, the University of Wisconsin, San Francisco State, Arizona State University, the University of Santa Clara, and Miles College, a Negro institution in Birmingham.

Beecher was for eight years a field administrator with President Roosevelt's New Deal, working with sharecroppers, coal miners, jobless city folk, migratory farm laborers, and Negroes and Jews discriminated against in employment. During this period his first two books of poems were published from "An American Place," Alfred Stieglitz's famous gallery in New York. Poet William Carlos Williams summed up Beecher's early work with "This is a man who speaks for the conscience of the people."

During World War II Beecher served under the Negro captain of the Liberty ship "Booker T. Washington," the first racially integrated unit in the American war effort. He wrote a book about his experiences aboard, All Brave Sailors, which Earl Conrad called in the Chicago Defender, "a milestone in literature and politics, the strongest stuff to come out of the war."

Following the German surrender Beecher was director of the Displaced Persons camps in the Stuttgart area. Upon his return home he headed the editorial section of the National Institute of Social Relations in Washington. He subsequently made an extensive study of farmer-labor politics in Minnesota, taught in California, and became a working rancher in the redwood country after refusing to sign the unconstitutional California state loyalty oath. While ranching he and his

artist wife, Barbara, founded a private press to print his work and that of other protest poets. Their books, pamphlets and broadsides brought them awards and worldwide recognition as fine printers.

In 1964 Beecher returned to the South to cover the civil rights movement as a correspondent for the San Francisco Chronicle and Ramparts magazine, of which he was an associate editor. His eighth book of poems, TO LIVE AND DIE IN DIXIE, appeared in November, 1966, and won immediate acclaim. He has given a great many readings from the book on campuses, in churches, and at civic and mass meetings before white and black audiences in all parts of the nation. A new volume of Beecher's selected poems is scheduled for publication in 1968.

SIDE I Band 1

IN EGYPT LAND

I

It was Alabama, 1932
but the spring came
same as it always had.
A man just couldn't help believing
this would be a good year for him
when he saw redbud and dogwood everywhere in bloom
and the peachtree blossoming
all by itself
up against the gray boards of the cabin.
A man had to believe
so Cliff James hitched up his pair of old mules
and went out and plowed up the old land
the other man's land but he plowed it
and when it was plowed it looked new again
the cotton and corn stalks turned under

the red clay shining with wet
under the sun.

Years ago
he thought he bought this land
borrowed the money to pay for it
from the furnish merchant in Notasulga
big white man named Mr Parker
but betwixt the interest and the bad times coming
Mr Parker had got the land back
and nigh on to \$500 more owing to him
for interest seed fertilize and rations
with a mortgage on all the stock -
the two cows and their calves
the heifer and the pair of old mules -
Mr Parker could come drive them off the place any day
if he took a notion
and the law would back him.

Mighty few sharecroppers
black folks or white
ever got themselves stock like Cliff had
they didn't have any cows
they plowed with the landlord's mule and tools
they didn't have a thing.
Took a heap of doing without
to get your own stock and your own tools
but he'd done it
and still that hadn't made him satisfied.
The land he plowed
he wanted to be his.
Now all come of wanting his own land
he was back to where he started.
Any day
Mr Parker could run him off
drive away the mules the cows the heifer and the calves
to sell in town
take the wagon the plow tools the store-bought furniture
and the shotgun
on the debt.
No
that was one thing Mr Parker never would get a hold of
not that shotgun...

Remembering that night last year
remembering the meeting
in the church he and his neighbors always went to
deep in the woods
and when the folks weren't singing or praying or
clapping and stomping
you could hear the branch splashing over rocks

right out behind.
That meeting night
the preacher prayed a prayer
for all the sharecroppers
white and black
asking the good Lord Jesus
to look down
and see how they were suffering.
"Five cent cotton Lord
and no way Lord for a man to come out.
Fifty cents a day Lord for working in the field
just four bits Lord for a good strong hand
from dawn to dark Lord from can till can't
ain't no way Lord a man can come out.
They's got to be a way Lord show us the way..."
And then they sang.
"Go Down Moses" was the song they sang
"Go down Moses, way down in Egypt land
Tell old Pharaoh to let my people go"
and when they had sung the song
the preacher got up and he said
"Brothers and sisters
we got with us tonight
a colored lady teaches school in Birmingham
going to tell us about the Union
what's got room for colored folks and white
what's got room for all the folks
that ain't got no land
that ain't got no stock
that ain't got no something to eat half the year
that ain't got no shoes
that raises all the cotton
but can't get none to wear
'cept old patchedy overhauls and floursack dresses.
Brothers and sisters
listen to this colored lady from Birmingham
who the Lord done sent I do believe
to show us the way..."

Then the colored lady from Birmingham
got up and she told them.
She told them how she was raised on a farm herself
a sharecrop farm near Demopolis
and walked six miles to a one-room school
and six miles back every day
till her people moved to Birmingham
where there was a high school for colored
and she went to it.
Then she worked in white folks' houses
and saved what she made
to go to college.

She went to Tuskegee
and when she finished
got a job teaching school in Birmingham
but she never could forget
the people she was raised with
the sharecrop farmers
and how they had to live.
No
all the time she was teaching school
she thought about them
what could she do for them
and what could they do for themselves.
Then one day
somebody told her about the Union...
If everybody joined the Union she said
a good strong hand would get what he was worth
a dollar (Amen sister)
instead of fifty cents a day.
At settling time the cropper could take his cotton to
the gin
and get his own fair half and the cotton seed
instead of the landlord hauling it off and cheating on
the weight.
"All you made was four bales Jim" when it really was six
(Ain't it God's truth?)
and the Union would get everybody the right to have
a garden spot
not just cotton crowded up to the house
and the Union would see the children got a schoolbus
like the white children rode in every day
and didn't have to walk twelve miles.
That was the thing
the children getting to school
(Amen)
the children learning something besides chop cotton
and pick it
(Yes)
the children learning how to read and write
(Amen)
the children knowing how to figure
so the landlord wouldn't be the only one
could keep accounts
(Preach the Word sister).

Then the door banging open against the wall
and the Laws in their lace boots
the High Sheriff himself
with his deputies behind him.
Folks scrambling to get away
out the windows and door

and the Laws' fists going *clunk clunk clunk*
on all the men's and women's faces they could reach
and when everybody was out and running
the pistols going off behind them.
Next meeting night
the men that had them brought shotguns to church
and the High Sheriff got a charge of birdshot in his body
when Ralph Gray with just his single barrel
stopped a car full of Laws
on the road to the church
and shot it out with their 44's.
Ralph Gray died
but the people in the church
all got away alive.

II

The crop was laid by.
From now till picking time
only the hot sun worked
ripening the bolls
and men rested after the plowing and plowing
women rested
little boys rested
and little girls rested
after the chopping and chopping with their hoes.
Now the cotton was big.
Now the cotton could take care of itself from the weeds
while the August sun worked
ripening the bolls.

Cliff James couldn't remember ever making a better crop
on that old red land
he'd seen so much of
wash down the gullies toward the Tallapoosa
since he'd first put a plow to it.
Never a better crop
but it had taken the fertilize
and it had taken work
fighting the weeds
fighting the weevils . . .
Ten bales it looked like it would make
ten good bales when it was picked
a thousand dollars worth of cotton once
enough to pay out on seed and fertilize and furnish
for the season
and the interest and something down
on the land
new shoes for the family to go to church in
work shirts and overalls for the man and boys

a bolt of calico for the woman and girls
and a little cash money for Christmas.

Now though
ten bales of cotton
didn't bring what three used to.
Two hundred and fifty dollars was about what his share
of this year's crop would bring
at five cents a pound
not even enough to pay out on seed and fertilize and
furnish for the season
let alone the interest on the land Mr Parker was asking
for
and \$80 more on the back debt owing to him.
Mr Parker had cut his groceries off at the commissary
last month
and there had been empty bellies in Cliff James' house
with just cornbread buttermilk and greens to eat.
If he killed a calf to feed his family
Mr Parker could send him to the chain-gang
for slaughtering mortgaged stock.

Come settling time this fall
Mr Parker was going to get every last thing
every dime of the cotton money
the corn
the mules
the cattle
and the law would back him.
Cliff James wondered
why had he plowed the land in the spring
why had he worked and worked his crop
his wife and children alongside him in the field
and now pretty soon
they would all be going out again
dragging their long sacks
bending double in the hot sun
picking Mr Parker's cotton for him.

Sitting on the stoop of his cabin
with his legs hanging over the rotten board edges
Cliff James looked across his fields of thick green cotton
to the woods beyond
and a thunderhead piled high in the south
piled soft and white like cotton on the stoop
like a big day's pick
waiting for the wagon
to come haul it to the gin.
On the other side of those woods
was John McMullen's place

and over yonder just east of the woods
Ned Cobb's and beyond the rise of ground
Milo Bentley lived that was the only new man
to move into the Reeltown section that season.
Milo just drifted in from Detroit
because his work gave out up there
and a man had to feed his family
so he came back to the farm
thinking things were like they used to be
but he was finding out different.
Yes
everybody was finding out different
Cliff and John and Ned and Milo and Judson Simpson
across the creek
even white croppers like Mr Sam and his brother Mr Bill
they were finding out.

It wasn't many years ago Mr Sam's children
would chunk at Cliff James' children
on their way home from school
and split little Cliff's head open with a rock once
because his daddy was getting too uppity
buying himself a farm.
Last time they had a Union meeting though at Milo
Bentley's place
who should show up but Mr Sam and Mr Bill
and asked was it only for colored
or could white folks join
because something just had to be done
about the way things were.
When Cliff told them
it was for all the poor farmers
that wanted to stick together
they paid their nickel to sign up
and their two cents each for first month's dues
and they said they would try to get
more white folks in
because white men and black
were getting beat with the same stick these days.

Things looked worse than they ever had in all his time
of life
Cliff James thought
but they looked better too
they looked better than they ever had in all his time
of life
when a sharecropper like Ralph Gray
not drunk but cold sober
would stand off the High Sheriff with birdshot
and get himself plugged with 44's
just so the others at the meeting could get away

and after that the mob hunting for who started the Union
beating men and women up with pistol butts and bull
whips
throwing them in jail and beating them up more
but still not stopping it
the Union going on
more people signing up
more and more every week
meeting in houses on the quiet
nobody giving it away
and now white folks coming in too.

Cliff James looked over his ripening cotton to the woods
and above the trees the thunderhead piled still higher
in the south
white like a pile of cotton on the stoop
piling up higher and higher
coming out of the south
bringing storm . . .

III

"You"
Cliff James said
"nor the High Sheriff
nor all his deputies
is gonna git them mules."
The head deputy put the writ of attachment back in his
inside pocket
then his hand went to the butt of his pistol
but he didn't pull it.
"I'm going to get the High Sheriff and help"
he said
"and come back and kill you all in a pile."

Cliff James and Ned Cobb watched the deputy whirl
the car around
and speed down the rough mud road.
He took the turn skidding
and was gone.
"He'll be back in a hour" Cliff James said
"if'n he don't wreck hisseff."
"Where you fixin' to go?" Ned Cobb asked him.
"I's fixin' to stay right where I is."
"I'll go git the others then."
"No need of eve'ybody gittin' kilt" Cliff James said.
"Better gittin' kilt quick
than perishin' slow like we been a'doin'" and Ned Cobb
was gone
cutting across the wet red field full of dead cotton plants

and then he was in the woods
bare now except for the few green pines
and though Cliff couldn't see him
he could see him in his mind
calling out John McMullen and telling him about it
then cutting off east to Milo Bentley's
crossing the creek on the foot-log to Judson Simpson's . . .
Cliff couldn't see him
going to Mr Sam or Mr Bill about it
no
this was something you couldn't expect white folks to
get in on
even white folks in your Union.

There came John McMullen out of the woods
toting that old musket of his.
He said it went back to Civil War days
and it looked it
but John could really knock a squirrel off a limb
or get a running rabbit with it.
"Here I is," John said
and "What you doin' 'bout you folks?"
"What folks?"
"The ones belongin' to you.
You chillens and you wife."
"I disremembered 'em," Cliff James said.
"I done clean disremembered all about my chillens and
my wife."
"They can stay with mine," John said.
"We ain't gonna want no womenfolks nor chillens
not here we ain't."

Cliff James watched his family going across the field
the five backs going away from him
in the wet red clay among the dead cotton plants
and soon they would be in the woods
his wife
young Cliff
the two girls
and the small boy . . .
They would just have to get along
best way they could
because a man had to do
what he had to do
and if he kept thinking about the folks belonging to him
he couldn't do it
and then he wouldn't be any good to them
or himself either.
There they went into the woods
the folks belonging to him gone

gone for good
and they not knowing it
but he knowing it
yes God
he knowing it well.

When the head deputy got back
with three more deputies for help
but not the High Sheriff
there were forty men in Cliff James' cabin
all armed.
The head deputy and the others got out of the car
and started up the slope toward the cabin.
Behind the dark windows
the men they didn't know were there
sighted their guns.
Then the deputies stopped.
"You Cliff James!" the head deputy shouted
"come on out
we want to talk with you."
No answer from inside.

"Come on out Cliff
we got something we want to talk over."
Maybe they really did have something to talk over
Cliff James thought
maybe all those men inside
wouldn't have to die for him or he for them . . .
"I's goin' out," he said.
"No you ain't," Ned Cobb said.
"Yes I is," Cliff James said
and leaning his shotgun against the wall
he opened the door just a wide enough crack
for himself to get through
but Ned Cobb crowded in behind him
and came out too
without his gun
and shut the door.
Together they walked toward the Laws.
When they were halfway Cliff James stopped
and Ned stopped with him
and Cliff called out to the Laws
"I's ready to listen white folks".

"This is what we got to say nigger!"
and the head deputy whipped out his pistol.
The first shot got Ned
and the next two got Cliff in the back
as he was dragging Ned to the cabin.
When they were in the shooting started from inside
everybody crowding up to the windows

with their old shotguns and muskets
not minding the pistol bullets from the Laws.
Of a sudden John McMullen
broke out of the door
meaning to make a run for his house
and tell his and Cliff James' folks
to get a long way away
but a bullet got him in the head
and he fell on his face
among the dead cotton plants
and his life's blood soaked into the old red land.

The room was full of powder smoke and men groaning
that had caught pistol bullets
but not Cliff James.
He lay in the corner quiet
feeling the blood run down his back and legs
but when somebody shouted
"The Laws is runnin' away!"
he got to his feet and went to the door and opened it.
Sure enough three of the Laws
were helping the fourth one into the car
but it wasn't the head deputy.
There by the door-post was John McMullen's old musket
where he'd left it when he ran out and got killed.
Cliff picked it up and saw it was still loaded.
He raised it and steadied it against the door-post
aiming it at where the head deputy would be sitting
to drive the car.
Cliff only wished
he could shoot that thing like John McMullen . . .

IV

He didn't know there was such a place in all Alabama
just for colored.
They put him in a room to himself
with a white bed and white sheets
and the black nurse put a white gown on his black body
after she washed off the dried black blood.
Then the black doctor came
and looked at the pistol bullet holes in his back
and put white bandages on
and stuck a long needle in his arm
and went away.

How long ago was it
he stayed and shot it out with the Laws?
Seemed like a long time
but come to think of it

he hid out in Mr Sam's corn crib
till the sun went down that evening
then walked and walked all the night-time
and when it started to get light he saw a cabin
with smoke coming out the chimney
but the woman wouldn't let him in to get warm
so he went on in the woods and lay down
under an old gum tree and covered himself with leaves
and when he woke up it was nearly night-time again
and there were six buzzards perched in the old gum tree
watching him . . .
Then he got up and shoed the buzzards away
and walked all the second night-time
and just as it was getting light
he was here
and this was Tuskegee
where the Laws couldn't find him
but John McMullen was dead in the cotton field
and the buzzards would be at him by now
if nobody hadn't buried him
and who would there be to bury him
with everybody shot or run away or hiding?

In a couple of days it was going to be Christmas
yes Christmas
and nobody belonging to Cliff James
was going to get a thing
not so much as an orange or a candy stick
for the littlest boy.
What kind of a Christmas was that
when a man didn't even have a few nickels
to get his children some oranges and candy sticks
what kind of a Christmas and what kind of a country
anyway
when you made ten bales of cotton
five thousand pounds of cotton
with your own hands
and your wife's hands
and all your children's hands
and then the Laws came to take your mules away
and drive your cows to sell in town
and your calves
and your heifer
and you couldn't even get commissary credit
for coffee molasses and sow-belly
and nobody in your house had shoes to wear
or any kind of fitting Sunday clothes
and no Christmas for nobody. . .

"Go Down Moses" was the song they sang
and when they had finished singing

it was so quiet in the church
you could hear the branch splashing over rocks
right out behind.
Then the preacher got up and he preached . . .

"And there was a man what fought to save us all
he wropped an old quilt around him
because it was wintertime and he had two pistol bullets
in his back
and he went out of his house
and he started walking across the country to Tuskegee.
He got mighty cold
and his bare feet pained him
and his back like to killed him
and he thought
here is a cabin with smoke coming out the chimney
and they will let me in to the fire
because they are just poor folks like me
and when I have got warm
I will be on my way to Tuskegee
but the woman was afeared
and barred the door again him
and he went and piled leaves over him in the woods
waiting for the night-time
and six buzzards settled in an old gum tree
watching did he still breathe . . ."

*The Sheriff removed Cliff James from the hospital to the county jail
on December 22. A mob gathered to lynch the prisoner on Christ-
mas day. For protection he was taken to jail in Montgomery. Here
Cliff James died on the stone floor of his cell, December 27, 1932.*

SIDE II Band 1

TO LIVE AND DIE IN DIXIE

I
Our gang
laid for the kids from niggertown
We'd whoop from ambush chunking flints
and see pale soles
of black feet scampering
patched overalls and floursack pinafores
pigtailed with little bows
flying on the breeze
More fun than birds
to chunk at
Birds
were too hard to hit

II

Old Maggie's sweat would drip and sizzle
 on that cast iron range she stoked
 but she was grinding at the handle
 of our great big ice cream freezer
 that day she had her stroke
 It put a damper on my mother's luncheon
 All the ladies in their picture hats and organdies
 hushed up until the ambulance took Maggie off
 but soon I heard
 their shrieks of laughter
 like the bird-house at the zoo
 while they spooned in
 their fresh peach cream

III

Asparagus fresh from the garden
 my dad insisted
 went best on breakfast toast with melted butter
 so Rob was on the job by six
 He used to wake me whistling blues
 and whistled them all day till plumb
 black dark when he got off
 Times Mother was away
 he'd play piano for me
 real barrelhouse
 (I liked it better than our pianola classics)
 and clog on the hardwood floor
 Rob quit us once to paper houses on his own
 but white men came at night and sloshed
 paint all over his fresh-papered walls
 took the spark plugs out of his Model T truck
 poured sand into the cylinders
 then screwed the plugs back in
 so when Rob cranked it up next day
 he wrecked the motor
 He came back to work for us
 but I can't seem to remember
 him whistling much again

IV

Black convicts in their stripes and shackles
 were grading our schoolyard
 At big recess we watched them eat
 their greasy peas off tin
 a tobacco-chewing white man over them
 shotgun at the ready
 and pistol slung
 In class we'd hear them singing at their work

"Go Down Old Hannah"

"Jumpin Judy"

"Lead Me to the Rock"

I found a convict's filed off chain once in the woods
 and took it home
 and hid it

V

Tired of waiting for Hallowe'en
 Jack and I had one ahead of time
 and went round soaping windows
 and chunking clods of mud on people's porches
 Mr. Holcomb though came out shooting
 his 45
 at us scrouged up against a terrace
 across the street
 He meant to kill us too
 because his fourth shot hit betwixt us
 not a foot to spare each way
 so we didn't wait for him to empty the magazine
 but just aired out a mile a minute
 Next day
 our mothers made us apologize
 and Mr. Holcomb said he wouldn't have shot at us
 except it was so dark
 he took us for nigger boys

VI

Confederate veterans came to town
 for their convention
 and tottered in parade
 while Dixie played and everybody gave the rebel yell
 but the Confederate burying ground near school
 where the battle had been
 nobody seemed to care about
 It was a wilderness of weeds and brambles
 with headstones broken and turned over
 The big boys had a den in there
 where they would drag the colored girls
 that passed by on the path
 and make them do
 what they said all colored girls
 liked doing
 no matter how much
 they fought back and screamed

VII

The Fourth of July
 was a holiday for everybody but people's cooks
 Corinne was fixing us hot biscuit

when I marched into the kitchen
 waving the Stars and Stripes
 and ordered her to
 "Salute this flag! It made you free!"
 I just couldn't understand why Corinne
 plumb wouldn't

VIII

Old Major Suggs
 ran for Public Safety Commissioner once
 orating against the black menace
 from his flag-draped touring car
 and got just 67 votes
 from a town that had 132,685 people in 1910
 Things were well in hand back then
 and folks were hard to panic
 One night a chicken thief got into
 old Major Suggs' hen-house
 and made off with some of his Barred Rocks
 The Major was slick
 and figured out the path the thief was sure to take
 back to niggertown
 so he took a short cut through the woods
 and hid behind a tree
 The thief came staggering
 beneath his sack of hens
 and caught both barrels in his face
 point-blank
 "That nigger flopped and flopped"
 old Major Suggs gloated long afterwards
 "just like a big black rooster that you've axed"

IX

Spurgeon would daub designs on flowerpots
 wheelbarrows
 garbage cans
 just anything he could get his hands on
 though all he had was house-paint
 and the kind of big flat brush
 you slap it on with
 My mother said
 Spurgeon was what you call
 a primitive
 One Saturday evening
 he was downtown window-shopping the pawnshops
 gawking at all the jewelry
 the pretty knives and pistols
 when a mob came tearing round the corner
 after another black man
 but they made Spurgeon do

SIDE II Band 1

"CHAINNEY"

The field boss claimed his privilege. Her knife quenched all his lust for black girls. She got life in the Big Rock and swung a chain-gang pick a quarter century before she broke. To save her keep they kicked her out, paroled. Root, hog, or die! Thereafter she despoiled our garbage cans of what our pampered pets repudiated. We capering white brats dogged her around, mocking that tethered gait. She shambled rolling-eyed down every street in Birmingham, mumbling of "Jedgment." All our minds were shackled by her chain and ball.

SIDE II Band 2

THE CONVICT MINES

Circa 1910

"You sho' God bettah dig yo' task lessen dat sweat-box git you or yo' bones be foun' down some ole shaft." At dawn the shackled men, lamps flaring on their caps, rode underground. Four bits a day each convict brought on lease, leading astute police to engineer crap games to raid. Feeding just pone and peas, mine owners heaped up fortunes year by year. Murderers proved most reliable trusties to stimulate output, wielding the thong on shirkers and the sick alike. The fees kept taxes down. Few deemed the system wrong, it worked so well. Crime profited the state and reinforced the black mortality rate.

SIDE II Band 3

DIXIE BARD

The inexorable anaperts of Dixie bard Stella Foxhall DeRoulhac rode to rescue white womanhood from brutish blacks. She charred foiled rapists in slow fires as surely due. Maternal cares oft frustrating her Muse, Stella conveyed her daughter's custody to a half-witted maid. The wench was loose but never asked for Sundays off at three. People, said Stella, were just pampering maids. The half-wit in the bushes held Love's court when school let out and soon the primary grades practiced precociously the eldest sport. Young Stella, barely six, showed future promise of nymphomania, nor did prediction miss.

SIDE II Band 4

FREE WORLD NOTES

I

Lowdown white sonofabitch comin in here and stirrin up our niggers to vote lemme at him with this here blackjack the cops done turned their backs

II

I find you guilty Brenda Travis age 16 of an aggravatin breach of the public peace for sittin down at the counter of the bus station cafe and I therefore sentence you to one year's imprisonment in the colored females' reformatory

III

We the coroner's jury bein duly sworn do find that State Rep'sentative Hurst did whip Herbert Lee a nigra boy age 52 right smart over the head with the butt of his pistol and did also fire a 45-caliber projectile into the nigra's intercranial cavity such bein the proximate cause of said Herbert's demise and we do further find and pronounce this act to have been justifiable homicide the nigra boy havin provoked the Rep'sentative unwarrantably by insistin that he be registered on the book and permitted to vote like a citizen

SIDE II Band 5

BESTRIDE THE NARROW WORLD

*"Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves."*
JULIUS CAESAR, I, ii.

We dangled them upon the edge a week letting them savor death and then reprieved them from their jeopardy a space. The style is new. The abominations of his war moved Lincoln to unmanly tears. Perhaps he pondered Scripture overmuch. We too bring God into our speeches. Fustian we spout as well to cloak our naked sword in words of righteous tone. Small matter if the skeptics are unconvinced. We have the countervailing force to make them cringe. No power makes us stoop to parley. Proud as pterodactyls in their prime are we, mighty as mammoths whose unrivaled thews the tundra binds in ice perpetual.

SIDE II Band 6

WISDOM OF THE ABBOT MACARIUS I

Said he: "I can no longer sanction any war for any purpose under God's sun or stars"
And they put him in chains

Said he: "I can no longer sanction any war for any purpose under God's sun or stars"
And they showed him the scaffold

Said he: "I can no longer sanction any war for any purpose under God's sun or stars"
And they laid his head on the block

Said he: "I can no longer sanction any war for any purpose under God's sun or stars"
And the ax fell

Whereupon the multitude fell silent thinking well
He could be right

SIDE II Band 7

A VETERAN'S DAY OF RECOLLECTION

We'd liberated Naples and the Wops had come aboard to work cargo. This starving Spik slipped a can of rations underneath his lousy rags. We drilled him. At Marseilles we mowed a stevedore down for pilfering some Spam. The Battle of the Bulge was on, V-bombs had knocked out Antwerp but the God damned Frogs struck every ship of ours in port. P-40's shot up Palermo for the hell of it. Pinpoint objectives? Tenements! Krauts wrecked Le Havre's docks and blew. The town was open. Flying Fortresses blasted it flat and left some thirty-thousand dead allies of ours. Christ, how those ruins stank! GI's in Germany went "one to shoot and three to loot." We always gave a Hershey to the frauleins that we ganged.

SIDE II Band 8

UNDESIRABLES

*"I lift my lamp beside the golden door."
Emma Lazarus. Inscription for the Statue of Liberty.*

The lifted lamp is guttering, near spent its fuel. Double-barred the golden door which, when it opens, opens on a chain. Where throngs poured through, police interrogate each refugee, admitting but the few who pass security and kiss the Book. Carl Schurz would be excluded with his staunch compatriots of Eighteen Forty-Eight whose rebel blood caused liberty to grow in their adopted land. Could Juárez get a visa from the State Department? Would the FBI clear Dvorak, known to be in sympathies an anti-monarchist? (Deport the New World Symphony!) Martí, the Cuban foe of imperialism? Lorca, the anti-fascist poet? These men were all subversive as in earlier times Tom Paine, Pulaski, Lafayette. The authorities would surely bar such undesirables.

7

SIDE II Band 9

SILENT IN DARIEN

He glimpses through dividing wire gold thighs and shameless buttocks of *señoras gringas* at play like children on the grass, his hell their paradise. Bloat-bellied, puny sex exposed, his brood clamors about the shack tin-cans and cartons built. Girls who survive turn assets, spreading rachitic legs to ease off-duty Yanqui personnel. His sons besides the pimping trade will follow such pursuits as untaught hands may ply for rice and beans, fare foreordained, lucky those days they feed. In crystal shrines across the fence one sees prime cuts of beef — *por Dios!* — milk, the precious nuggets of the hen enclosed in cunning boxes, bins of liquors, sweets, rare nutriments whose flavors, even names are mysteries, done up in shimmering foil. The sky goes black as when a hurricane lowers from the Caribbean. Unobscured the sun glows bloody red. There will be wind.

SIDE II Band 10

THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

Do I have freedom here to search for truth and teach it to my students the way I used to before the oath and all these things came in? Freedom is such a nebulous word I don't know what you mean exactly You'd have to define your terms I teach the way I always have but you know how it is one goes on learning one grows more experienced one's taste becomes more disciplined one realizes that the young are prone to take things literally and so a gradual approach to truth is sometimes indicated It seems to me a choice of values is involved in this whole question of so-called academic freedom The public hires us to teach the young Well and good Would it then be fair for us to betray the public trust and teach our students what the public does not approve of? Clearly not and furthermore we are dependent on the public for our support At last our salaries begin to match those of professionals in other fields and should we jeopardize these gains with ill-conceived quixotic claims to be a law unto ourselves? Each year the legislature votes for us another three per cent increase in pay and look around you at these buildings our new gymnasium our stadium

These mean we have the public's confidence
 I wouldn't want to see this sacrificed
 I don't think you would either
 My attitude about the Mitchell case?
 My opinion is that Dr. Mitchell
 for all his undoubted brilliance
 is not a man of tact and showed less judgment
 than a full professor should possess
 The police force as we know is far from honest
 riddled with corruption if you please
 What city's force is any better?
 But to send one's students over town
 sticking their noses into everything
 with questionnaires
 not even leaving out the brothels!
 This was too much
 He put the institution and his colleagues
 to use a vulgar term upon the spot
 with that investigation of the links
 between police and prostitutes
 That kind of thing is not our business
 We should concern ourselves
 with the eternal verities
 and not the ephemeral passing show
 We see events in true perspective only
 generations after they occur
 and all this hue and cry
 over academic freedom
 will surely seem a tempest in a teapot
 a century or two from now
 Of course it is a shame that Dr. Mitchell
 had to go
 He'd published many books
 and was a credit to the faculty
 May you quote me?
 Oh no indeed!
 I meant no criticism by my remark
 It was a wise decision to dismiss him
 I just meant . . .

Really I didn't mean a thing
 but Mitchell was my friend
 Don't quote me though
 I want that off the record

SIDE II Band 11

IF I FORGET THEE, O BIRMINGHAM!

- I.
 Like Florence from your mountain.
 Both cast your poets out
 for speaking plain.
- II.
 You bowl your bombs down aisles
 where black folk kneel
 to pray for your blacker souls.
- III.
 Dog-torn children bled
 A, B, O, AB as you.
 Christ's blood not more red.
- IV.
 Burning my house to keep
 them out, you sowed wind. Hear it blow!
 Soon you reap.

SIDE II Band 12

A HUMBLE PETITION TO THE PRESIDENT OF HARVARD

I am, sir, so to speak, "a Harvard man."
 In legendary times I lugged my green
 baize bag across the Yard to sit while fierce
 Professor Kittredge paced his podium
 in forked snowy beard and pearl-grey spats,
 mingling his explications with his views

obscurantist on life and letters. Texts
 prescribed for us were caponized. Prince Hamlet
 made no unseemly quips anent the thighs
 Ophelia spread for him nor did that poor
 crazed beauty sing the naughty songs for which
 she's celebrated. Nice young men were we
 in Kitty's class. Extra-curricular
 our smut -- Old Howard queens of bump and grind,
 the Wellesley girls who warmed our chambers. Such
 the Harvard I recall: Widener's great hive,
 whose honeyed lore we rifled and bore off
 on index cards, all nutriment destroyed;
 the home of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow;
 dank mournful halls; an ill-proportioned pile
 commemorating boys who'd marched away
 to die for causes the professors had
 endorsed, knowing infallibly which side
 God and their butter were upon. Our boot-
 legger was Polish. Christened Casimir
 Zwijacz he'd changed his name to Lawrence Lowell
 after fair Harvard's president. Ambushed
 and shot by high-jackers who coveted
 his rot-gut load, Lowell barrelled his truck
 back from Cape Cod and, bandaged bloodily,
 made punctual deliveries to all
 his Cambridge clientele, fresh lustre shed
 upon an honored name. *Per aspera!*
 Nostalgic reminiscences brought on
 by your most recent bulletin. I learn
 of your "Commitment to the Modern", penned
 expressly for Old Grads by Lionel
 Trilling, D. Litt., a masterpiece, I thought,
 of academic prose, so clear and yet
 so dark. It cheers me that you do not change
 at Harvard, like *castrati* whose voices
 retain their boyish purity. Trilling
 delights me with his cadenced double-talk.
 "The radical," says he, and dares to add
 "subversive" in a breathless tone, is like
 to be predominant among the forces of

our time. Already on the student mind
 (so impatient of the rational) this force
 works powerfully. Oppose it, counsels he,
 in order that it may grow strong and strike
 deep roots. "Bland tolerance," he trills, "subverts"
 subversion, makes it wither on the vine.
 The way to nurse dissent is to impose
 conformity -- the logic's Lionel's --
 and carefully exclude dissenters from
 the faculty. Would we aid William Blake
 to mew his mighty youth? Deny stipends.
 Give ninnies suck at Alma Mater's teats.
 Wean Blake. Choose Doodle in his stead as Poet
 in Residence lest William be suborned
 by excess of ease and lick the arses that
 require booting. The University
 of Hard Knocks is the proper berth for such
 obstreperous geniuses. "When we are scourged,
 they kiss the rod, resigning to the Will
 of God," as Swift observed of moralists
 like Trilling. Fend from me, I beg you, sir,
 offers of chairs magnates endow. Waylay
 me with no teaching sinecure. (Degrees
 sufficient to impress the Dean are mine.)
 Summon me never to recite my verse
 before a convocation in my honor
 nor to appear in doctoral costume
 as orator at Commencement. Such coddling,
 as Trilling rightly says, would work my ruin.
 Let me forever cope with penury
 and cold neglect. Let me be ostracized
 for practising ideals you fine folk
 are given to prating of at ceremonies.
 Do what you please with me defunct. Put up
 a plaque. Dissect my corpse in seminars.
 Transmogrify my bones to index cards.
 Hang my dead portrait in the library
 and crucify your living rebels still.

DIGEST OF COMMENTS ON JOHN BEECHER'S POETRY

TIME magazine: "Beecher is a product, and a
 proponent of the great unfinished American
 Revolution."

Critic MAXWELL GEISMAR: "Beecher combines
 so much that is best in our literary past -- he
 almost is our literary past in both personal and
 artistic terms -- as to be an almost unbelievable
 figure. . . it is a pleasure to acclaim a poet like
 John Beecher."

JOHN HOWARD GRIFFIN, author of *Black Like
 Me*: ". . . a great work, timeless and contempo-
 rary and somehow growing up from the very earth
 that Beecher knows so well and loves so poignantly."

Folk-singer PETE SEEGER: "John Beecher's
 TO LIVE AND DIE IN DIXIE is a great book. I've
 never before picked up a volume of poetry and not
 been able to lay it down before I finished it."

SATURDAY REVIEW: "The note of protest that
 sounds throughout this collection belongs to a
 tradition as old as poetry itself. Beecher plays
 upon its multiple possibilities."

FATHER THOMAS MERTON, poet and theologian,
 author of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *Seeds of
 Contemplation*, etc.: "I find the poems tremen-
 dously moving, very convincing and persuasive."

MADISON CAPITAL-TIMES: "Beecher . . . is a
 poet of integrity and power writing in the core
 tradition of creative America. . . he belongs in
 the same company as Thoreau, Emerson, Whit-
 man, Melville and Robert Frost."

Poet THOMAS MC GRATH: ". . . this is not per-
 sonal protest at all, but a holy rage at the enemy
 at home and a mine of tenderness for the insulted
 and injured, the jailed and blacklisted."

Critic CORNELIA JESSEY in WAY: *Catholic
 Viewpoints*: "It is poetry infused and suffused
 with evangelism; poetry voicing outrage with man
 and also with God; it is a kind of gospel poetry
 like gospel singing; it is also like jazz music,
 peculiarly American, different. . ."

WASHINGTON STAR: "Beecher. . . is that 'con-
 science of the people' that William Carlos Williams
 called him."

BIRMINGHAM NEWS: "His trumpet calls over and
 over for the South to rise again -- against its
 past."

STUDS TERKEL, radio interviewer of Station
 WFMT, Chicago, author of *Division Street:
 America*: "John Beecher is a highly dramatic
 figure. . . He is a marvelous and compelling
 reader and talker."

WINNIPEG TRIBUNE: "More than just poetic
 protest, this volume represents almost a life's
 work. . ."

LATITUDES (Houston quarterly): "If the revolu-
 tion in this country, be it intellectual or otherwise,
 has failed, it is not John Beecher's fault. He has
 been sitting in, freedom riding, publishing his
 protest, and, in general, just getting into the
 Establishment's dirty hair. He is a man of action,
 certainly, and all his poetry pulsates with action."

Poet LESLIE WOLF HEDLEY in MAINSTREAM: "Here
 is a writer with an invincible social instinct.
 Beecher will be even more important tomorrow
 because he is actively and responsibly attempting
 to shape a more progressive tomorrow. His
 poems constantly reflect his deep commitment. . .
 an almost lifelong engagement in art and in the
 streets of America."