

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/1

Dee Allen

CLOTILDA

Mobile River,
Tombigbee and
Alabama Rivers
In confluence,

Held onto
A rather
Ghastly secret
Laying low

On a thick
Muddy floor,
Bed of seaweed,
Under shimmering waves for generations.

Recently re-emerged, pieces of
A crime scene
No longer hidden
Under voluminous freshwater:

Clotilda.
Trade schooner.
Transporter of 110
Dahomey slaves.

Rusted, barnacled iron
Bolts, nails and spikes,
Fragments of wooden ship plank—
Clues to criminal activity

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/1

Starting out as a bet
Between 2 Southern White rich men.
They'd bet that slaves can be
Smuggled in before the law got wise.

Shipping run, round trip
From Alabama to Dahomey and back
5143 miles either way to reduce the
African to cargo one more time—

Hush-hush. Easy. Night-time
Furtive swap between schooner & steamboat,
Clotilda & Czar, before the floating
Evidence was burnt & sunken.

Naked Yoruban
War captive human
Freight deposited into swamp,
Sold to plantations.

Gentleman bettors
Never jailed,
Never punished,
Their crime—dismissed by the law.

Slavery, civil war—
Both ended.
But longing for home
Continued without cease.

Yoruban survivor's of the Clotilda's journey
Never owned boats, knew not the way back home
Across the wavy aquatic wild.
With money saved from cotton plantation work,

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/1

Land, lumber, nails, mortar were bought.
Buildings, houses, African traditions formed a community.
Dahomey came back into their lives
As Africatown—

Dahomey: West African country now re-named Benin.

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/1

WEELAUNEE

Traditional
Muscogee/Tsalagi land,
Then seized
Colonisers' war spoils,
Then slave
Plantation where planter's family's wealth was made,
Then city
Prison farm, sharecropping as a penalty,
Slowly reverted
To healthy green
Forest as it was in years of yore—

Forces of entertainment
And law enforcement
Have alternate visions
For 350 wooded acres—

High-speed car chases,
Late-night drug raids,
House-to-house searches,
Combative crowd control,

More explosions
Than a Hollywood Summer box office hit,
Bullets fly replacing birds
Inside an artificial city—

To the woods and
Their human guests,
Tragedy strikes
Both ways—

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Chainsaws ready to cut.
Bulldozers move to clear.
The vision of 98%
Conflicts with this frightening future—

Person of conscience
Was shot defending
The forest of South Atlanta.
State troopers' guns
Made that certain.
Take out one forest protector
And many more will take their place.

The forest belongs not to the movie industry.
The forest belongs not to the police.
Weelaunee belongs to itself.

Weelaunee: Muscogee: "Green/brown/yellow river."

Muscogee: What the Creek Indians call themselves.

Tsalagi: What the Cherokee Indians call themselves. Pronounced: "Chah-lah-gee."

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OVERCOME

Try as devils might

To change the look of

The big picture

Passing itself off as a democracy,

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THEY CAN'T REMOVE US ALL.

*For the longest time,
They have used*

Abandonment

Brutality

Criminalisation

Displacement

Enslavement

Force-fed false history

Gentrification

Harassment

Intoxication

Jokes told—spite in disguise

Ku Klux flaming cross night-rides

Lust towards our grrrls & women

Mass murder

Negation of our views

Or

Police intimidation

Queens' African beauty devalued

Religion—Christianity passed down by Pilgrims

Sterilisation

Terrorism

Unity broken

Vicious discrimination

White imperialism

X out credit for our contributions

Youth killed before age 25

Z—last letter—last considered, 1st targeted

All the tricks implemented

On us & yet

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Our people are still mating.

Our women are still breeding.

Our people are still here.

Our culture is still here.

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WE HAVE OVERCOME

Endeavours by devils
 To whittle our number
 To nothing—

WE HAVE OVERCOME.

It's been a long, arduous walk
 On the road to progress.

Reacting to muscle memory, repeatedly
 Hurling over
 Obstacles we didn't design
 Over time—

We look forward
 To thriving in
 The next 400 yrs.
 & what they may bring.

We look forward
 To days of joy, seeking pleasure we deserve

Not to forget about oppression,
 But to surmount oppression
 Before it regains ground
 To conquer spirit

By having
 The best times of our lives.

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Be loud,

Be lively,

Be talented

Because

THEY CAN'T SILENCE US ALL.

WE HAVE OVERCOME.

& whenever possible,

We'll do it again.

W: Martin Luther King Birthday 2023

[For Rawle James, Lantern Carrier, S'phongo, Zomkhonto, Elemen2al,

Midnight, Rosegold, Stacy Ardis Dyson and Zita Holbourne.]