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White "Soul Sister" reviews past experiences, says racial bias remains an American dilemma

—WASHINGTON— In the late 1960s, Grace Halsell, a white woman, took a medication to darken her skin and went to Mississippi seeking to work as a black woman. In her recently published memoirs, "In Their Shoes," Halsell says racial discrimination remains an American dilemma.

In her best-selling book, "Soul Sister," Halsell wrote about her experiences as a southern white woman who darkened her complexion to live as a black woman in highly segregated Mississippi. Before President Lyndon B. Johnson personally hired her to work as a speech writer in the White House, Halsell had, over a period of two decades, written her way around the world, to include Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Orient, and the Americas.

Halsell, in her memoirs, relates her experiences as a white "Soul Sister" in the 1960s in the perspective of current times. "When I went to Mississippi to seek work in the 1960s as a black woman, the best job I could get, back then, was working for \$5 a day as a maid." On

one occasion, Halsell was arrested for attending an all-white church.

"If I darkened my skin today," Halsell writes, "I wouldn't be arrested for entering an all-white church on Sunday. But almost three decades later, we remain two nations, black and white, divided and unequal. And our churches remain the most segregated institutions in America."

On returning to Mississippi today in the role of "Soul Sister," Halsell commented, "As an educated black woman in the south, I would find job opportunities and make an ample income."

However, socially, the same barriers are still present. African Americans have made significant individual gains, but class discrimination based on race is as deep as ever.

A life-long journalist and writer, Halsell has also written books while disguised as a Navajo Indian and an illegal Mexican laborer. In the 1970s after living on a Southwest Indian reservation for a year, Halsell, dressed in the clothes of a Navajo friend, Bessie Yellowham, traveled to

California and worked as a Navajo nanny for a white family.

Some years later, with no documents or any identification papers, Halsell crossed with Mexican illegals from Mexico, entering three different U.S. cities along the 2,000-mile border.

By changing her identity from a white speech writer in the White House to a black maid in Mississippi, a Navajo Indian and later an illegal Mexican, Halsell, according to author and literary critic Gore Vidal, "has led the most interesting and courageous life — or lives — of any American of our time."

"I sought to live more lives than one, to risk hardships and to gain understanding of others," said Halsell. "Becoming someone other than myself — while remaining myself — were experiences within my lifelong goal: attempting to live free from barriers of gender, color, creed and race."

Halsell, who lives in Washington, D.C., is "thinking seriously" of updating "Soul Sister" by a new series of experiences, possibly in a northern city.

THE LOCAL ORGANIZATION COMMITTEE OF THE MILLION MAN MARCH SENDS A CALL TO ACTION

TO THE BLACK COMMUNITY OF WINSTON-SALEM



Left to right: Larry Leon Hamlin, Larry Wombie, Darryl Watson, and Minister Mickey Muhammad.

A Call To Action:

Keep The Spirit of the Million Man March Alive! The local organizing committee of the million man march is calling all black men, women, teenagers, children, churches, fraternities, sororities, Prince Hall Masons and the Order of Eastern Star, businesses, and other clubs and organizations to participate in Winston-Salem's Million Man March on Saturday, October 19. The march will begin at 12 noon and proceed from the Winston Mutual Building on Fifth Street to Corpening Plaza at First and Liberty Streets. Stay for an excit-

ing program of music, song, poetry, speeches, and other entertainment. Exhibitors and vendors will encircle the park. All marchers are asked to report to the Winston Mutual Building by 11:00 AM.

For further information call Larry Leon at the NC Black Repertory Company (910) 723-2266.

Sponsored by the local organizing committee, NC Black Repertory Company, and Fathers and Friends.

African-American Cultural Center Hosts dialogue series

North Carolina State University's African-American Cultural Center and Center Stage will host "Conversations: Having Our Say," a dialogue series leading up to the Feb. 22 Center Stage production of "Having Our Say."

The successful Broadway play was adapted from the best-selling book of the same name that recounts the remarkable lives of Raleigh natives Sadie and Bessie Delany.

The sisters were 103 and 101 at the time the book was published.

The campus-community conversations, free and open to the public, will deal with black women's issues as inspired by the Delany sisters' words of wisdom. The series is co-sponsored by the Society for African-American Culture, The African-American Heritage Society and Sista 2 Sista.

All conversations will take place at 7 p.m. in room 356 in the African-American Cultural Center, Witherspoon Student Center, at the corner of Cates Avenue and Dan Allen Drive on the NC State campus.

The series includes Wednesday, Oct. 9 — "Sisters and Brothers in the Movement," Dr. Paul Bitting, Dr. G. Wyatt Sydnor and Robert Sydnor will lead a discussion of how black men and women

relate to each other in the political and professional arenas. Though the Delany sisters were professional women, they were often relegated to the background in a male-dominated society.

Their book deals with women's rights, among other issues.

Monday, Nov. 25 — "In the Company of Ourselves," Denise Wimberley will lead the conversation about how African-American single women cope. Asked how they managed to live so long, Bessie Delany once remarked, "We never had husbands to worry us to death."

Tuesday, Jan. 14 — "Sisters Then and Now," Dr. Yvonne Moses, Carolyn Holloway and Courtlana Barnes, will lead the conversation about commitment to "sister" relationships today. Sadie Delany once said, "After so long, we are in some ways like one person."

The NCSU Center Stage performances of "Having Our Say" are scheduled for 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. Sat., Feb. 22, in Stewart Theatre. Pre-show discussion will be led by Dr. Patricia Caple at 6:45 p.m. in the Walnut Room of the University Student Union.

For information about the dialogue series, call (919) 515-5210.

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