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Press Clippings

Newspapers in western North Carolina gave extensive coverage this summer to a tragic murder case that was almost tailor-made to give homophobes like Cooper an excuse to attack the gay community. But except for a few unfortunate headlines and the usual butchering by the Associated Press, the story was treated about as well as we could hope for.

James Keith Ross, 32, who had been convicted at least twice previously for sexual activity with young boys, was given two death sentences August 21 for murdering two teenaged boys who had threatened to expose him as a homosexual. Incredibly, Ross worked as a caretaker at a Boy Scout camp near Morganton in spite of his previous convictions.

The state's evidence included testimony by the mother of one of the boys, who recounted a conversation she had with her son two days before he was murdered. "Momma, I got him over a barrel. I know what he is and I'm going to expose him," the boy had told his mother (Morganton News-Herald, 8/16/85). Prosecutors also presented evidence that Ross had engaged in homosexual acts with at least three boys at the scout camp.

Ross presented no evidence until after he was convicted of two counts of first-degree murder. But at the sentencing hearing he testified that he was "introduced to homosexuality" (Morganton News-Herald, 8/21/85) at age nine by a 15-year-old paperboy and that he was molested by his seventh-grade history teacher. When he got older he sought out young boys himself, and in 1972 was diagnosed as a pedophile at John Umstead Hospital in Butner.

Ridiculing defense witnesses who testified about the civic activities Ross engaged in, District Attorney Alan Leonard said they were merely a front for his "disgusting perversion" (Hickory Record, 8/21/85). Leonard said that Ross' homosexual involvement with young boys "has had the same destructive force on the children" as the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima (Asheville Times, 8/21/85). On the other hand, Ross' lawyer said that Ross was the victim of the same crime he grew up to perpetrate. "This is the only lifestyle he learned from age nine," the Asheville Times (8/21/85) quoted the lawyer as saying.

Press reports leave it unclear whether the "disgusting perversion" or the "lifestyle" referred to sexual activity with minors or to homosexuality in general. But it seems clear from the portions of Ross' testimony recounted in the press that Ross himself saw homosexuality as synonymous with pedophilia.

The confusion of homosexuality and child molestation in the Ross case led the Asheville Citizen (8/22/85) to run an editorial headlined "Homosexuality: More Openness Could Help." Herewith some excerpts:

"Professionals in mental health, and many other people, will look upon [the Ross case] as the kind of tragedy that comes in a culture where homosexuality itself (as opposed to child abuse) is considered a terrible sin and an awful crime.

"Homosexuality always has been with us. It existed even in ages when homosexuals were persecuted far more than they are today.

"Repression does not work. It does not result in less homosexuality; it only forces homosexuality underground, and brings guilt and fear to those who practice it...

"Homosexuality should be considered separately from sexual abuse of children. Child abuse is another problem entirely. Most child abusers are heterosexuals. Homosexuals abuse children in about the same percentage as heterosexuals...

"Ross testified that he was first abused at age 9 by a boy who was 15, and the abuse continued for several years. That may or may not have contributed to his homosexuality; it almost certainly had something to do with his becoming a child abuser. In any case, his pathology went far beyond homosexuality. Had he been willing to confront his childhood experiences, and to seek help at an earlier age, his life may have taken a much different course...

"How much better it would be if young people could be educated about sex (including homosexuality), if they were given an awareness and understanding of what is going on with their bodies and emotions, if they were taught to recognize and to deal with the ambivalent feelings they experience..."

One sad footnote to the Ross case is that some people blamed the murdered boys for accepting money from Ross in exchange for sex. "A lot of people are saying they got what they deserved," said the mother of one of the boys (Morganton News-Herald, 8/28/85). "I never thought people could be so heartless."

Well, I guess this mother never read anything by Ashley Cooper or Bob Windsor.

In his September 5 *Landmark*, Windsor says it's now time to put gay men and Haitians in concentration camps. "I think North Carolina is being irresponsible if they continue to do absolutely nothing to identify the high risk groups that are potential carriers [of AIDS] and if necessary quarantine them for the protection of society in general," Windsor wrote. "There are old army camps all over the country that could be converted to regional centers where these people could be kept and given extensive tests to determine if they are in fact a risk."

After calling for strict enforcement of the crime against nature law, Windsor tells us how he would identify the Haitians. He then says, "The Homos [sic] would not be too hard to identify. The Gay Bars in Chapel Hill, Raleigh, Greensboro, Charlotte and everywhere advertise in gay papers. Undercover people could frequent the bars and get names."

Windsor leaves a stack of *Landmarks* in every public building in Raleigh, and there was a time last year (about the time Windsor accused Governor Hunt of having a "pretty young" boyfriend) when people actually picked it up and read it. But nowadays you can find stacks of unread *Landmarks* several days after they are left, and if there is no stack out in the open, chances are good it's in a nearby trashcan.

The only reason I'm still concerned about Windsor is the effect he's bound to have on the meanies out there who actually believe what he says. At least one of Windsor's associates is now active in the White Patriot Party (also known as the Ku Klux Klan), and that is not a group to take lightly.

And so I continue to boycott *Landmark* advertisers and urge others to do the same (I'm happy to report that Nowell's furniture store in Cary had a \$5000 contract cancelled because of their *Landmark* ad). But this boycott business is a trial, especially when you like the chicken livers at Dip's Country Kitchen as much as I used to. But even now, with praise from Craig Claiborne himself in the New York Times, I can't quite bring myself to go back to Dip's.

Bob Windsor may languish on the ash heap of history, but "Ashley Cooper" is still with us, if only because so many South Carolina newspapers run his columns. And Cooper has sense enough to attack only one group at a time. "Notwithstanding what [Moral Majority VP Cal Thomas] calls 'the bogus attempt to drag in Haitians,' homosexuals caused the AIDS epidemic," Cooper writes (Charleston News & Courier, 8/27/85).

"Many of us—perhaps most of us—are prejudiced against practicing homosexuals," writes Cooper. "We feel sorry for them if anal intercourse with other males turns them on... We're also prejudiced against referring to the performers of anal intercourse as 'gays.' We think they are 'sads.'"

Cooper's diatribe—and this kind of stuff goes on for 22 paragraphs—reminds me of a story Roy Blount, Jr. tells in his wonderful essay from *Crackers*, "Heterosexism and Dancing." Blount visited Allen Tate, the Southern poet, when Tate was on his deathbed, and Tate said he

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