

Waterbrook LLC

IN MEMORY OF

Helga Burnham Watson & Hubert Watson

TWELVE STEPS *for*
WHITE AMERICA

IS DEDICATED TO

The Honorable
Constance Slaughter-Harvey

MISSISSIPPI CIVIL RIGHTS ICON

"As the deer pants for the waterbrook, so my soul pants for you, oh God"

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TWELVE STEPS FOR WHITE AMERICA: FOR AMERICA IS DEDICATED TO

The Honorable Constance Slaughter-Harvey

Twelve Steps for White America is dedicated to a living legend. The Honorable Constance Slaughter-Harvey is an iconic Mississippi civil rights attorney lauded alongside Fannie Lou Hamer and Leontyne Price as one of twenty notable Mississippi women of the 20th Century.¹ Constance Slaughter-Harvey ascended to unimaginable heights of political achievement in an era when integrating the University of Mississippi (known as “Ole Miss” - a term for the “mistress” of a slavery plantation)² precipitated the intervention of the United States Supreme Court, the Kennedy Administration, and a federalized National Guard for James Meredith to enroll amid rioting.

Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett taunted Attorney General Robert Kennedy and President Kennedy, pontificating that this was “*our greatest crisis since the war between the states.*”³ The governor’s crisis was a Black man enrolling at “Ole Miss” - not the “backlash” riot. James Meredith’s 1962 televised trailblazing required a military-style occupation of the “Ole Miss” college town, Oxford, Mississippi. Rowan Oak, William Faulkner’s home in Oxford, remains a literary tourist attraction.⁴ Faulkner’s nephew, a Captain in the federalized Mississippi National Guard, protected Meredith from the mob of violent white insurrectionists, defending their way of life from democracy’s march forward.⁵

Constance Slaughter followed this “*greatest crisis since the war between the states*”⁶ to enroll at the University of Mississippi School of Law. An unabashed pantheon of white patriarchal supremacy, the “Ole Miss” law school reigned as a reliable status quo progenitor of racialized hatred in Mississippi.⁷ In that world, Constance Slaughter triumphed as the first African American woman to earn a law degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law, where the Confederate rebel and Confederate flag were mascot and banner. Her courageous and inspiring career produced a domino-effect of firsts across Mississippi history becoming the first African American woman judge and then the first African American Assistant Secretary of State | General Counsel, serving for 12 years.

¹ Beveridge, L. (2020). Civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer and opera singer Leontyne Price among inspiring women on Mississippi list. USA TODAY (Published 12:06 PM PDT Aug. 13, 2020 Updated 7:15 PM PDT Aug. 26, 2020.) Retrieved 20 May 2021 from: <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/life/women-of-the-century/2020/08/13/mississippi-woman-history-poet-author-activists-19th-amendment/5003960002/>

² Parry, M. (2019). The Trouble with Ole Miss. The Chronicle of Higher Education (Nov 8, 2019). Retrieved May 21, 2021 from: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-trouble-with-ole-miss/>

³ U.S. Department of Justice, (2021). The U.S. Marshalls and the Integration of the University of Mississippi. U.S. Marshall Service. Retrieved May 21, 2021 from: <https://www.usmarshals.gov/history/miss/02.htm>

⁴ www.rowanoak.com

⁵ *Ibid* 3

⁶ Doyle’s 2001 book describing these events is titled, *An American Insurrection, the Battle of Oxford Mississippi, 1962*. Interestingly, this is how the January 6, 2021 insurrection is characterized. A state CEO manipulates racialized undercurrents to incite riot against “x” (“backlash”) so that the status quo (sustained by white supremacy) benefits elite White Americans in power. Certifying Biden’s win by over 7 million votes the day after a historical slave state elects two senators - one Jewish, one African American - is a templated replay of the “crisis” of James Meredith enrolling at “Ole Miss.” This repeat is not a “*what’s happening to our country*” moment. It is a predictable playbook tactic which persists because the United States has never repented and atoned for slavery. We keep doing it. Slavery legacies are alive in the present. White Americans are responsible for dismantling the rigged advantage the flows to them to this day from the legacies of slavery. The USA remains at risk on this faultline, compromised until a repair is complete. Twelve Steps for White America outlines the steps needed for the repair.

⁷ Stanford University Law School, (2021). ABA Women Trailblazer’s Project. Robert Crown Law Library. Retrieved May 20, 2021 from:

https://abawtp.law.stanford.edu/exhibits/show/constance-i-slaughter-harvey/biography?_ga=2.110698829.914675179.1597941222-1936040103.1597615574

Early on, I only knew “Connie” as the daughter of that nice lady owner of the Six Cees Superette, Mrs. Olivia Kelly Slaughter, who quoted Shakespeare. Connie’s father, Mr. W. L. Slaughter, was an esteemed educational administrator and Forest, Mississippi alderman, who earned a Master’s degree from UCLA after losing his left hand in WW II.⁸ When you could buy gas at the Six Cees Superette for 32 cents per gallon,⁹ my country parents and the impressive and accomplished Slaughters worked for local change when “Connie” (one of the six Slaughter daughters of the Superette’s six “Cees”)¹⁰ was becoming a historical juggernaut for justice. “Local change” is my euphemism for my parents’ life-risking voter registration drives, community organizing with the Scott County Improvement Association, and working with Mississippi Action for Progress to launch Head Start in Lauderdale, Scott and Neshoba Counties. *Freedom Summer’s* Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner had recently been murdered there by the KKK colluding with law enforcement,¹¹ events portrayed in the film, “Mississippi Burning.”¹²

Years later in Oakland, California, I met Black Panther Party co-founder, Bobby Seale, who delivered the commencement address where I was a college Vice President. He spoke as an elder statesman recalling the Black Panther Party’s Free Breakfast Program for school children and voter registration drives. Afterward, in our brief encounter, I referenced his address saying that in the Sixties, Mother and Daddy had worked in voter registration drives in Mississippi. This legendary Black Panther raised his knowing eyebrows and said, “*They were some brave people.*”¹³

His empathic words broke open my soul. Cloaked in academic doctoral regalia, I might as well have been ten years old, barefooted on a dirt road, twitchy after the Klan threatened to kill us. Triggered raw faded fear flooded me. I cried hot tears to heaven on the way home, praying, “*I hope y’all heard that - the co-founder of the Black Panther Party said y’all were brave.*” Short but so sweet - it was an extraordinary source of validation uttered for my parents. They worked exposed and threatened, largely uncredited for their sacrifice - shrouded in a tamping whiteness that settles even the Civil War as simply “the late unpleasantness.”¹⁴

As I grew older, I appreciated Constance Slaughter beyond family friend “Connie” whom my parents adored. I came to know her better after I graduated from high school; and, as one does, dropped out of university to enter a psychiatric hospital diagnosed with depression (*undiagnosed alcoholism, actually*). Surely out of love and sympathy for my parents’ grasping for what to do, “Connie” hired me to do some office work where, early in her career, she founded East Mississippi Legal Services as Executive Director. Through my haze of psychiatric meds, I can hardly remember any of it. What I do

⁸ Ibid

⁹ U.S. Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy. Retrieved May 27, 2021 from <https://www.energy.gov/eere/vehicles/fact-915-march-7-2016-average-historical-annual-gasoline-pump-price-1929-2015>

¹⁰ Scott County Times Online, (2018). Slaughter Legacy Honored: Forest Alderman W. L. And Mrs. Olivia Kelley Slaughter Honored (Posthumously) By Jackson Tougaloo Alumni Club. Scott County Times. Retrieved: May 21, 2021 from: <https://www.sctonline.net/front-page-slideshow-features/slaughter-legacy-honored#sthash.74ptwXBg.dpbs>

¹¹ Ownby, T. (2017). Mississippi Action for Progress (MAP). Center for Study of Southern Culture. Mississippi Encyclopedia. Retrieved May 21, 2021 from: <http://mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/mississippi-action-for-progress/>

¹² FBI History (1964). Mississippi Burning. Famous Cases & Criminals Retrieved May 30, 2021 from: <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/mississippi-burning>

¹³ Author Recollection, (2021). 2016 Black Graduation Ceremony Commencement Address. Peralta Community College District. Oakland, CA.

¹⁴ Raven I. McDavid Jr. & Virginia G. McDavid (1969). The late unpleasantness: Folk names for the Civil War, *The Southern Speech Journal*, 34:3, 194-204, DOI: 10.1080/10417946909372004

know is that her dignity and investment in my future mitigated my nightmare of alcoholism and depression - lighting a way forward beyond my immediate demoralization at a teetering time of life. Grateful, I became a fan of the history-making Constance Slaughter. Mother and I attended her wedding celebration at LeFleur's Restaurant in Jackson, Mississippi. Thereafter, she became known to history as Constance Slaughter-Harvey.

I learned more about my parents' affections for "Connie" and appreciated the mutuality of their relationship when she eulogized my father in 2007 and later visited my Mother regularly in nursing care until she passed in 2013. It was a great honor for someone of Constance Slaughter-Harvey's status to eulogize my father. The son of outhouse-poor racist sharecroppers, he ran away from his life before completing high school. Proffered by a African American civil rights legend in a southern white country church pulpit, the transcendent symbolism of just her presence credited sacrifice to a man who once told me, *"You can go to church with them racist som-bitches if you want to - I'd rather go to hell."* Laughter erupts easily at a southern funeral as it did when Connie referenced his well-known obsession with *"them goddam Republicans."* In retrospect, it was funnier as obsession then, than as prophecy now.

A few years later at Mother's funeral, Connie revealed to me that Mother was already a member of the NAACP *"when Medgar was killed."* Those were hallowed words of respect from Connie, who, inspired by Medgar Evers, marched in his tragic funeral procession only ten days after she met him.¹⁵ The day Mother died, the Mississippi House of Representatives adjourned in her honor. I knew who made that happen. The Democratic Party's Resolution hailed Mother as "Lady Warrior."¹⁶ This was the fiercely moral social-justice Mother I knew - not the sweet old quirky lady from her "white"-washed eulogy.

After Mother's funeral, waiting at Reagan International to board a flight home to San Francisco, I opened my wallet to give my credit card to a café's chatty-sweet server. Surprised by the unexpected, she said, *"I hope you don't mind me asking, but I noticed the NAACP membership card in your wallet and I'm just curious."* I explained, *"Every time I open my wallet, it reminds me of who I am and where I'm from. Mother was a Yellow-Dog Democrat who would expect me to be a card-carrying member. She was already a member of the NAACP 'when Medgar was killed'."*

Even now, as an "expat" of Mississippi for many years, the stifling inching of Mississippi time, the Slaughters, the Watsons, the NAACP *"making democracy work since 1909,"* the voter registration drives, MAP-Head Start, James Meredith-Ole Miss, twitchy bare feet on dirt roads, my precarious coming of age, and the Honorable Constance Slaughter-Harvey all burnish in sagas of memory - a legacy of the price already paid and the debt still due. As Faulkner wrote in Requiem for a Nun,

The past is never dead. It's not even past.



¹⁵ Sadoff, J.H., (2011). Pieces from the Past: Voices of Heroic Women in Civil Rights. Tascara Books, Minneapolis, MN.

¹⁶ Clark, H. & Knowles, C., (2013). Resolution in Memory of Helga Burnham Watson. Scott County Democratic Executive Committee. Officially Adopted 5-13-2013.



WATERBROOK, LLC

William Watson founded Waterbrook, LLC, in 2020.

Mission Waterbrook is a USA democracy project that works for peace and prosperity through justice then liberty for all.

Vision Waterbrook potentiates democracy's promise for the Beloved Community.*

Meaning Watson's recovery from alcoholism is linked to his aspiration for spiritual fulfilment expressed by the Psalmist, "*As the deer pants for the Waterbrook, so my soul pants for you oh God.*"

Legacy Part of MLK's rhetoric, Amos' prophecy "*Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream*" was familiar and fortifying for many civil rights workers in 1960s Mississippi.

Blessing May this Waterbrook flow into mighty streams of righteousness and justice that democracy may be long lived.

Milestones The 2022 Cognella Press publication of Twelve Steps for White America and the companion workbook will be a key milestone for Waterbrook.

WILLIAM WATSON, Ed.D.

From a dirt-road childhood in Mississippi, William Watson learned democracy watching Southern born parents risk their lives (and his) in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement.

Self-medicated to survive coming of age, he is now sober from alcoholism for more than three decades.

After a career as a psychotherapist treating people experiencing substance use disorders, he prototyped award-winning equity innovations in Higher Education for over 20 years.

He is an Aspen Institute Presidential Fellow for College Excellence (*with Stanford Educational Leadership Initiative*). The doctorate he earned from San Francisco State University centers social justice and equity.

Dr. Watson founded Waterbrook, LLC, during the Covid 19 pandemic amid autocratic threats to the future of American democracy. With the clarity of of crises' crucibles, Watson formed Waterbrook, LLC answering these questions: "What am I made of" "What can I uniquely contribute" and "What can one's spiritual transcendence catalyze at scale."

* <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>

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