

Clues sought in 1946 Georgia lynching

MONROE, Ga. (AP) - The dirt road that led to Moore's Ford Bridge is paved now, and the creaky wooden bridge has been replaced with a sleek concrete span. But the black letters "KKK" sprayed on the new bridge's face offer an eerie reminder of the terrible events that happened here 60 years ago.

Bobby Howard brushes back a leafy tree branch, revealing a half-dozen other racist scribbles. He sniffs his disgust, but he is not surprised. He has long forsaken his personal safety to fight the culture of fear that has suppressed the truth of what took place on the bridge. He still hopes that truth may come out — in a courtroom.

The horror unfolded 60 years ago, on July 25, 1946.

Ruby Butler, who was bunching cotton on a dusty road when she saw cars lined up bumper-to-bumper rattling toward the bridge, recalls: "I thought they were having a party down there. They were having a killing party."

Across town, White farmer Loy Harrison was driving home two Black couples, Roger and Dorothy Malcom and George and Mae Murray Dorsey, who was seven months pregnant.

There were whisperings around town that George Dorsey, who had fought in the Army during the war, had secretly been dating a White woman, a taboo in the segregated South. And there was no love lost between the townsfolk and Roger Malcom, who had stabbed a White farmer during a knife fight 11 days earlier.

He was still waiting in jail when Harrison paid \$600 to

bail him out.

When Harrison's truck rolled near the crossing, a White mob grabbed the two couples from the vehicle, dragged them down a nearby trail and tied them to trees. Using rifles, shotguns and pistols, the mob fired three volleys of bullets, leaving their bodies behind slumped in the dirt, according to investigators.

President Harry Truman dispatched the FBI to Monroe, a town about 45 miles east of Atlanta.

The feds, however, were met with a wall of silence.

Harrison, the farmer who claimed he'd been "ambushed" but was unharmed, told investigators he didn't recognize the dozen or so unmasked assailants. Other Whites abided by a code of silence. Blacks, too, kept quiet, petrified of reprisal if they spoke out.

Several suspects were named in the FBI's 1946 investigation, but, partly due to a lack of witnesses, none was ever charged.

"The best people in town won't talk," a frustrated Georgia State Patrol Maj. William Spence was quoted as saying.

Howard, living in nearby Social Circle, was 5 years old when the two couples were lynched. It was as a teenager that he began to question why no one was ever brought to justice in the brazen, public killings at Moore's Ford.

A ride home from a civil rights rally in 1967, at which Howard had shaken hands with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., convinced him to try to find answers.

On the ride, Dan Young, head of the local NAACP chapter, motioned to Howard

to glance out the back window of his car. The moment they had crossed the county line, he said, a car had rolled up behind Young's vehicle, trailing it.

"People are watching every move I make," Young said. "That's why I need someone else helping me."

Howard swore he would, and made good on his word when he returned to Social Circle. He became a civil rights soldier, pushing back legalized segregation in his small town by banding together a group of young Blacks who fought to integrate the school system and city pool.

As the public face of the group, Howard received regular threats. One night, his mother's home was firebombed, and another time, he said, he had to reverse course hastily when he spotted the barrel of a gun that someone was apparently aiming at him.

Howard also faced scorn from his own community each weekend, when he took out a list that Young had

given him of purported witnesses to the killings, and encouraged them to come forward.

Varying his route so he could assure residents he wasn't being followed to their homes, or meeting sharecroppers when they came to town, Howard nonetheless made no progress. Weekend after weekend, the potential witnesses slammed doors in his face or ran him off their property.

"They'd yell at you; they'd curse at you..." he said. "They didn't want to get their family killed."

As the years went by, some people finally agreed to come forward, but the faded memories of the killings and the names of suspects and witnesses long dead that they offered were never enough to compel local prosecutors to bring charges.

To this day, Howard, a spry 65-year-old, is unfazed. He still tries to persuade witnesses to snap the culture of fear that's prevented them from coming forward.

He's certain that at least

two of the lynching suspects are still alive, even if they are in their 80s, and remains confident that authorities will eventually take action. Harrison, the White farmer, is among those who have died.

Earlier this year, the FBI decided to take another look at the case. The local prosecutor, Walton County District Attorney Ken Wynne, has said he's willing to hear anything new, but said he doesn't have sufficient evidence and witnesses to reopen the case now. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation said it still pursues every lead it gets and has never closed the case.

The renewed interest didn't happen by chance. A network of politicians, civil rights activists and relatives of victims joined forces in 1997 to press for prosecution. The group, called the Moore's Ford Memorial Committee, gathers every July to lead a rally and a re-enactment.

Howard, a member of the group's board of directors,

still encounters fear, even six decades after the lynchings.

Ruby Butler, the sharecropper who had seen the White mob, hushes her great-grandson's video game as Howard strolls up to greet her.

Times may have changed, the 89-year-old woman acknowledges, but old habits die hard.

"I'm too old for them to do anything to me," she said. "But so many people are afraid to come forward. You can't get nobody to talk."

Anticipating the answer, Howard asks Butler once more if she has persuaded a reluctant friend to share her memories of the lynching.

Butler clenches her eyes closed, sadly shaking her head no.

Howard sighs as he turns to go. Outside, he voices frustration: "There's no way these people can say they lived. They just existed all these years."

Then, as he's done for years, Howard walks back to his car and drives down the dusty road to the next home.

Reid, labor key in state caucus bid

Nevada interests hopeful to land 2008 presidential primary

WASHINGTON (AP) - Democrats were lobbied hard by Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid and organized labor before they picked Nevada as the best bet to energize the party's early presidential voting in 2008.

A Democratic rules panel on Saturday recommended that Nevada hold a caucus after Iowa's leadoff contest in mid-January 2008, but before New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation primary. South Carolina was awarded an early primary a week after New Hampshire.

The full Democratic National Committee will have to approve the plan during its August meeting in Chicago before the changes become effective.

The addition of Nevada to the first round of voting is likely to reshape the Democratic presidential campaigning in the opening rounds — shifting some of the candidates' attention and time usually reserved for Iowa and New Hampshire to Nevada's glitzy casinos and hotels, sprawling suburbs and growing Hispanic population.

Aides for several potential candidates are already making contacts with key political figures in Nevada — es-

pecially with union representatives for the hotel and restaurant workers, Democratic strategists say.

In the end, the lobbying of Reid and organized labor trumped the lobbying of Democratic Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano and the shadow of likely GOP presidential candidate John McCain, Arizona's senior senator.

"Nevada won because they did a better job of politicking," said Don Fowler, a member of the rules committee and former national chair of the DNC. Nevada Democrats also argued that they have experience running caucuses.

Much of the politics was handled by Reid, the senior senator from Nevada and part of the Democrats' congressional leadership team. "Reid worked it hard, but so did Governor Napolitano," said Democratic veteran Harold Ickes. "My sense is that he talked to everybody on the committee and he saw many of us in person."

Organized labor, particularly union leaders representing the hotel and restaurant workers, also campaigned for Nevada to get the early slot.

Inclusion of a state with a

strong labor contingent was one of the Democrats' goals of diversifying the vote. About a quarter of Nevada voters in 2004 were in unions or came from union households, according to exit polls — a higher concentration than in many states. And they leaned toward Democrat John Kerry over President Bush in 2004. Almost a fourth of the population of Nevada is Hispanic.

Arizona was appealing to many of the Democrats voting Saturday, but the presence of McCain as a likely GOP presidential candidate raised concerns that Arizona may be a lost cause for the general election.

Early contests can build party strength. And Democrats may have their eye in 2008 on snagging Nevada, where Bush beat Kerry by just over 2 percentage points in 2004. "Nevada has the potential of flipping from a red state to a blue state," said panel member Donna Brazile.

Some Democrats were uncomfortable with the dominance of the gambling industry in Nevada, said rules panel member Elaine Kamarck, who added, "They would have liked to see more

economic diversity."

The full DNC usually accepts the recommendations of the rules panel, but the debate over the 2008 primary calendar may resurface when the Democrats consider the changes at their summer meeting in Chicago next month or beyond. Some states would like to see the calendar changed even more.

And New Hampshire — especially in the person of Secretary of State Bill Gardner — is mulling over how to react.

Gardner must decide whether the changes violate a state law that requires New Hampshire to schedule its primary a week or more before any "similar election." He could move the New Hampshire primary earlier to protect its status.

"The DNC does not set the date for the New Hampshire primary," said Pamela Walsh, a spokesperson for New Hampshire Gov. John Lynch.

"Bill Gardner does. He will uphold New Hampshire law and set the primary date and the filing period as he feels is appropriate, and Governor Lynch will support him in whatever decision he makes."

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(Continued from Page 11)

lieve that access to financial power will close the remaining social, political and economic gaps that exist between Whites and ethnic minorities in this country.

They have different priorities for their money than their older counterparts who helped finance the first phase of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. They're more interested in gaining access on Wall Street than marching on Washington. They tend to send their money to programs that emphasize individual attainment and employ a business model of operation.

So, let Warren Buffett serve as a role model. You don't have to be rolling in money for your contribution to make an impact. Let history be an example of that.

As author Isaac Asimov once wrote, "No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be."

Our community must embrace change if we want to stand upon the shoulders of our predecessors and achieve our dreams.

Marc H. Morial is president and CEO, National Urban League.