

Yesterday's News Could a tiny North Carolina town hold the secret to saving the newspaper industry?

Road to Freedom
Come along on a civil rights and blues tour of the Old South.

Salvation from Sioux Falls
A South Dakotan is giving the special-needs children of Los Cabos a second chance.

AMERICAN AIRLINES - AMERICAN EAGLE

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A Lifetime of Devotion

Maybe you think **Smokey Robinson** is one of the most important entertainers of all time. We second that emotion.

CELEBRATE
BLACK HISTORY

Let Freedom Ring



In the summer of 2006, I took a long, meandering road trip from the bottom of the country all the way to the top. The trip was billed as “research,” but it was much more than just the gathering of facts. This trip was a chance to relive history — for better and for worse — in an attempt to gain a sense of what life was like in the country’s midsection. ¶ The research in question was for a book I wrote later that year. The book,

Damned to Eternity, tells the story of James Scott, the only man in Missouri history who has ever been arrested, charged, tried, convicted, and sentenced for the felonious crime of “Intentionally Causing a Catastrophe.” Authorities said he caused a destructive levee break along the Missouri side of the Mississippi River that perpetuated the Great Flood of 1993. He is serving a life sentence. To get a sense of life along Old Man River, I decided to drive the entire 2,320-mile length of the Mississippi, from the Gulf of Mexico outside New Orleans all the way up to Lake Itasca in central Minnesota. The way I saw it was: If I’m to write a flood book, I need to see how all these people on the floodplain live.

On my second day of driving, my research on levees and river systems turned into a makeshift tribute to another

set of travelers: those who did that same drive 45 years earlier, only in reverse. And for another reason.

As I drove through the beautiful Magnolia State, a landscape unfolded that made me understand why Mississippi consistently and historically retains its residents. The countryside was lovely, especially along the loess-soil bluffs in Vicksburg. But the deeper I ventured into Warren County, and as I drew nearer to Tallulah, Louisiana, on the other side of the Mississippi River, the more mournful I became.

The lush geography morphed into a pockmark in my mind’s eye. I could no longer see the river as the livelihood or as the lifeblood of America. What I saw was a crime scene.

In 1964, three years after the Freedom Riders barnstormed the Old South to challenge the notion of separate but equal, two 19-year-old black hitchhikers, Charles Moore and Henry Dee, were abducted by Ku Klux Klansman James Ford Seale outside Meadville, Mississippi.

Seale and two other Klansmen beat the men and drove them 100 miles away to Warren County. They were then tied to an old Jeep’s engine block and dumped, still alive at the time, into an offshoot of the Mississippi River.

I stared out at the rolling water and shuddered to think that Americans — that humans — could be capable of such violence. I was born after 1964, but I’ve long been a student of history and have learned about the tremendous advancements both by and for African-Americans in the ’60s. As this tragedy unfolded down in Dixie, Smokey Robinson and a man named Berry Gordy Jr. were putting Detroit’s Motown Records on the nation’s musical map. That brand of feel-good doo-wop continues to be a source of inspiration in musical and societal spheres, yet the duality of its coming of age amid so much brutality was not lost on me as my rental car lumbered along a lonesome Mississippi highway in the summer of 2006.

We are pleased to offer this

issue of *American Way* in honor of Black History Month, which is recognized and celebrated every February. Coming on the heels of Motown’s 50th anniversary and juxtaposed with Smokey Robinson’s own 70th birthday, this issue provides one of the best profiles of Smokey that I’ve ever read (page 34), written by Detroit institution W. Kim Heron.

This issue also takes you on the civil rights trail through Mississippi (page 28), where music once mixed with revolution.

I went down to the river in the summer of 2006 to investigate a claim of regional injustice against a man named James Scott. I left the river with a newfound reverence for those pioneers who drove down south 45 years earlier to fight against a national injustice.

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