

"HOW LOW DO YOU GO?"

In or around January 1998, an article entitled "Stiffer Actions Needed Against Officer" was published in the "Opinions" section of the Starkville Daily News (SDN). The article was published because a courageous, concerned citizen was brave enough to speak out about a hideous, shameful event that occurred only a few weeks earlier in the Starkville Police Department (SPD), where Captain David Lindley of the SPD put on a Ku Klux Klan suit and wore it around in the police department. Dorothy Bishop, former President of the Oktibbeha County Chapter of the NAACP, who has been a civil rights activist for over 40 (forty) years, is the courageous citizen who spoke out against what many feels was a racist act. After a previous article had appeared in the newspaper revealing that Captain Lindley—a public servant had done such a thing, Mrs. Bishop replied by voicing her opinion and presenting it in writing to Brian Hawkins, a writer with Starkville Daily News, who published it in the "Opinions" section of the newspaper.

Captain David Lindley of the SPD took a Ku Klux Klan suit out of the evidence room at the SPD, put on the suit, and wore it around inside of the SPD. Captain Lindley, when questioned regarding the incident said he did it as a joke, supposedly "making fun of the Klan mentality". Making fun of or belittling the Klan mentality does not require Captain Lindley or anyone else doing something as racist and degrading as wearing a Klan suit--whether inside or outside the police department. As a result of his actions, Captain Lindley received a mere punishment of administrative leave with pay--pending an investigation. Later, he was allowed to return to his regular duties. Captain Lindley's actions rekindled feelings that have been buried by some, but are still ever-present on the surface of many hearts, souls and minds--especially those of many African American citizens of Starkville and Oktibbeha County. Many of us keep our feelings about such actions like those of Captain Lindley's to ourselves; some of us talk among ourselves; some of us won't say anything at all, because we're afraid; others feel like what's the use? If I do speak out, nothing's gonna change. Things have remained the same as far back as I can remember.

Some things have not changed at all. Recently, the position for Starkville Police Chief was open. Two (2) candidates who qualified for the position were Captain John Outlaw an African American officer and Captain David Lindley, the White or Caucasian officer who wore the Ku Klux Klan suit through the SPD. Both candidates have served approximately the same amount of time and were captains at the SPD. A decision was made to seek a candidate who lived outside of the Starkville area to fill the position. Many folk felt this decision was made because the Board of Alderman knew that many African American citizens of Starkville would oppose having Captain Lindley being appointed because of his "Klan mentality", and many Caucasians would oppose having Captain Outlaw appointed because he is an African American. It was later determined mandatory that the position **would** be filled by one of the candidates from the SPD. Finally, the Board of Alderman appointed Captain Lindley as the new Starkville Police Chief. Conveniently (it seems), Roy Perkins, the only African American who serves on Starkville's Board of Alderman was not present for this particular meeting.

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Talk about adding insult—conveniently (it seems) there has been a new position created in the Starkville Police Department—"Assistant" Police Chief". The position was created and appointed to Captain John Outlaw after Captain Lindley was appointed police chief.

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Many African American citizens of Starkville feel that the board's decision to appoint Captain David Lindley as police chief is like a slap in the face and definitely a huge step backward for the City of Starkville. Some of us are just too afraid to speak out. It certainly seems like those responsible (namely, the Starkville Board of Alderman) for making important decisions that affect the well being of the good citizens of Starkville does not care much about race relations and certainly have no respect or concern for African American citizens who live in the city of Starkville and Oktibbeha County. How could anyone who has stooped so low be placed so high? Many citizens of Starkville believe that Captain Lindley should not have been placed in a position where he has the authority to make such crucial decisions that affect the lives of so many African Americans; a strong, beautiful group of humans that the Ku Klux Klan stole and sold, hated, tormented, lynched, raped, and killed.

Several weeks ago, Mrs. Bishop voiced her concern regarding this matter. She then presented it in writing to Brian Hawkins at the Starkville Daily News (SDN)) and requested that it be published in the "Opinions" section of the newspaper. After some time had past and the article had not been published she spoke with Brian who told her that he would not publish the information because it would "cause too many problems" and "stir up too much trouble". She was also told that she was a making trouble and needed to just leave things alone. Brian told Mrs. Bishop that a Black officer had also worn the Ku Klux Klan suit inside the SPD during the time Captain Lindley wore it. She responded by asking Brian the name of the Black officer and telling Brian that it didn't matter who wore the suite or what officer's race might be, she felt that it was not right. We should be moving forward instead of moving backward. Brian gave the information back to Mrs. Bishop and told her again that he would not publish it. He would not give he a name for the person he accused. Before she left, Mrs. Bishop was told that Brian's boss was Don Norman, the publisher of SDN. During the course of the day she spoke with several others who were deeply concerned regarding issues surrounding the position for police chief and told them about the incident at SDN. The next day, Mrs. Bishop and some others (including Mrs. Rhonda Conner who is the wife of the late Dr. Douglas L. Conner, M.D. who was also a longtime civil rights activist) decided to go back to SDN as a group, and talk with Brian Hawkins and Don Norman hoping Brian would reconsider publishing the article. ~~They were not allowed to speak with Brian Hawkins at all.~~ Don Norman refused to publish the article and told them that "Things should be left alone," and "There is no need to keep re-hatching the past, ~~because it's going to hurt too much.~~"

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"Re-hatching"...?

Captain Lindley "re-hatched" the past when he made a conscious decision to put on that degrading Ku Klux Klan suit, wear it through the Starkville Police Department, and make fun of ...who?

Starkville's Board of Alderman "re-hatched the past" when they made a conscious decision to appoint Captain David Lindley, a person who many citizens sees as a racist, as the Chief of Police for the Starkville Police Department.

Starkville's Board of Alderman also "re-hatched the past" when they conveniently created a position for Captain John Outlaw as "Assistant" Chief of Police in an attempt to make some of us feel better about David Lindley being appointed Chief of Police.

Brian Hawkins and Don Norman "re-hatched the past" when they made a conscious decision to deny Dorothy Bishop and other concerned citizens the opportunity to voice their opinion in the "Opinions" section of the Starkville Daily News.

After hearing or reading this article, anyone who is 18 (eighteen) years or older and is not registered to vote should be running to get REGISTERED and VOTE in any and every election they can. It is our lack of voting that enables persons to be placed in public positions and offices when they have no business being there.

Mrs. Dorothy Bishop has been working faithfully for over 30 years transporting and helping her fellow citizens get registered and get to and from the polls to vote. If anyone in the Starkville area needs help in getting registered to vote or needs transportation to go and vote, please don't hesitate to call her at 662-323-6670.

Thank you sincerely.