

# James Benning

## ALABAMA

30758 San Martinez Road, Val Verde, CA 90384

March 12-13th, 19th-20th, and 26th-27th, 2022

In the spring of 1967 I went to hear Stokely Carmichael speak at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Afterwards, a small group of us hung around to ask questions. I told him about growing up in a poor white neighborhood adjacent to Milwaukee's all-Black Near North Side. I asked what he thought about organizing both poor white and Black people together. He answered, "Perhaps that's something you should do."

Val Verde was founded in 1924 when three Black people - actor Sidney P. Dones, insurance agent Norman Houston, and community activist Hattie S. Baldwin - purchased a 30-acre Spanish rancho from Laura Janes. Janes, a white woman from Pasadena, disfavored the Jim Crow laws that made it difficult for Black people to own land. The town established its own lumber mill and houses were built by the community. It became one of the few Black-run towns in California. I've lived here since 1987.

### Kitchen:



*Alabama-Coushatta arrowheads, ca 1830s*

Found objects, stone

1¾" to 3½"

By the early 1500s, European fortune hunters and explorers arrived in what is now Alabama. The tribal groups already residing there included the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek and Chickasaw, as well as the Alabama-Coushatta and the Yuchi.

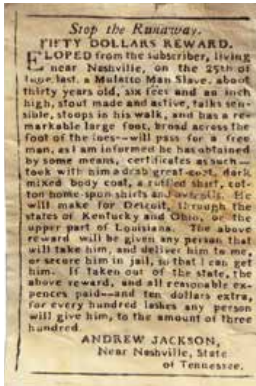


*Alabama map, 1856*

Artifact, ink on paper

17" X 14"

## Front Room:



### *Stop the Runaway, 1804*

Ink on newsprint

5¼" x 3½"

Newspaper ad placed by Andrew Jackson in the *Tennessee Gazette*, October 3, 1804. Jackson purchased a property known as the Hermitage that same year and became a wealthy slaveholder. During his lifetime, he owned over 300 slaves, half of whom were kept during his US Presidency, 1829 to 1837.



### *Andrew Jackson, 1844*

Photograph

3¾" x 5"

As president, Andrew Jackson held anti-abolitionist views and brought about the forcible removal of Native Americans from their ancestral homelands. He was a central figure in forcing the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Creek, Choctaw, Ponca, and Seminole nations to leave Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina and Florida resulting in the death and hardship of the Trail of Tears.



### *Civil War bullets, circa 1860s*

Objects, lead with patina

¾" x ¼" diameter

Nearly 120,000 Alabamians served in the Confederate forces. Approximately 35,000 died and another 30,000 were seriously wounded.



### *Andrew Jackson*

Stack of 25 uncirculated twenty-dollar bills

2¾" x 6¼" x ¼"



### *Special Election*

Stack of 25 silkscreen prints, oil ink on paper

15" x 24" x ½"

When the people of Alabama voted on December 12, 2017, Roy Moore lost by 21,000 votes with 1.3 million cast. The deciding votes came from a large turnout of Black women voters. Moore was born in Gadsden, Alabama on February 11, 1947. His loss inspired *ALABAMA*.



Nathan Meier  
*Nathan Bedford Forrest*  
Silver pencil on paper  
7½" x 5½"

Nathan Bedford Forrest was a cotton farmer, slave owner, slave trader, Confederate Army general during the American Civil War, a founding member and first leader of the Ku Klux Klan, and president of the Selma, Marion, & Memphis Railroad. In 1869, after a year as Grand Wizard, he attempted to dissolve the Klan and ordered their hoods and robes destroyed, but to no avail. Later in life he denied having ever been a member.



*The Central Bank of Alabama, 1856*  
Object  
3" x 7¼"

The Central Bank of Alabama was chartered by the Alabama State Legislature in 1854 and was constructed the following year at One Court Square in Montgomery, where it still stands today. It was the first bank to grant loans to the Confederate government in the early days of the Civil War.



*WOODWARD IRON COMPANY*  
Object, wooden box, black dirt  
12¼" x 16¼" x 11¾"



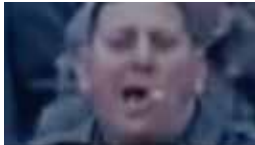
*CAMDEN HOME & FARM*  
Object, wooden box, black dirt  
12" x 18" x 9¼"

The Black Belt runs through the U.S. South and is named after its rich soil of that color. Now it also refers to skin color. Alabama's red dirt is caused by the iron oxide mineral, hematite.

**Video Loop (14:14):**



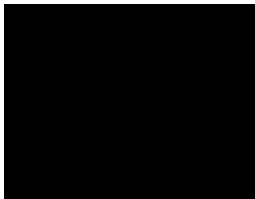
*The Birth of a Nation*, 2:33 minutes



*Inaugural Address, George C. Wallace*, 1963, 3:18 minutes



*Selma, March 7, 1965*, 1:22 minutes



*Angela Davis, California State Prison*, sound only, 4:00 minutes



*The Outlaw Josey Wales*, 3:01 minutes



*Inaugural Address, George C. Wallace, 1963*

Ink on paper

13¾" x 8¼"

George Wallace was born in Clio, Barbour County, Alabama on August 25, 1919. In 1952 he became a circuit court judge with liberal leanings and ran for governor of Alabama in 1958. Upon losing to a Ku Klux Klan supported candidate, Wallace reportedly said, "I was out-niggered, and I'll tell you here and now, I will never be out-niggered again." He then hired Asa Carter as his speechwriter. Carter was born in Anniston, Alabama on September 4, 1925. In the mid 1950s, he was active in the Ku Klux Klan and founded a paramilitary splinter group. Upon shooting two of his own members, he was arrested on two counts of attempted murder. The charges were later dropped. In 1970 Carter broke his ties with Wallace, changed his first name to Forrest, and began to write novels, his first being *The Rebel Outlaw: Josey Wales*. The Clint Eastwood film, *The Outlaw: Josey Wales* was based on Carter's novel. In 1982 George Wallace became governor of Alabama for a fourth term. This time the Black vote helped him to victory.



*Inmate Handbook (Male), 2013*

Alabama Department of Corrections, booklet

11" x 8½"

In Alabama, Black people are incarcerated 2.1 times that of white people.



*Alabama 8th grade history text, 1957*

Photograph

11¼" x 16½"

An Alabama grade-school history text published in 1957 defends the Ku Klux Klan.



*Bank, 1896*

Object, J.E. Stevens, Pat. 455, Child's bank

6" x 5" x 5¾"



*Child's KKK robe and hood*

Hand-sewn robe and hood

24" x 35" x 3"

Children of Ku Klux Klan members are brought to rallies beginning a few months after their birth. Many are baptized into the Klan, with a Grand Dragon sprinkling holy water over their heads.



*After Traylor*

House paint and pencil on chipboard

11 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Bill Traylor was born a slave in April 1853, in Benton, Lowndes County, Alabama. He started painting at the age of 82. Between 1939 and 1941 he completed over 2,000 paintings seated in front of a blacksmith's shop on Monroe Avenue in Montgomery, Alabama.



*Booker T. Washington*

Stereo photograph

3 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Booker T. Washington at the Negro Industrial School he founded in Tuskegee, Alabama. The students constructed all of the buildings.



Jimmy Lee Sudduth

*Red Shirt Fellow, 1984*

Mud, sugar, and house paint on Masonite

48" x 24"

Jimmy Lee Sudduth was born on March 10, 1910 near Fayette, Alabama on a farm at Caines Ridge. He painted with mud and found pigments, such as motor oil and plant juices, along with house paint.



*Scottsboro Boys*

Photograph

10" x 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

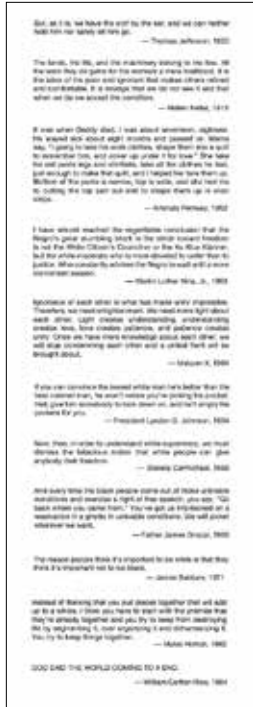
The Scottsboro Boys were nine Black teenagers falsely accused of raping two white women, Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, on a freight train in Alabama in 1931. The case was tainted by all-white juries, rushed trials and disruptive rioters, and prompted a lynch mob before the suspects had been indicted.



Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, 1931

Photograph  
4½" x 5¾"

In the second of three trials, Bates admitted that the rapes had never happened, but a guilty verdict was still reached. Price and Bates, out of work, had hopped the freight train to look for employment in the nearby cotton mills.



Door Text

Ballpoint ink on door  
62" x 19"



Nathan Meier

In memory of  
Pencil drawing on paper  
10¼" x 13"

Although the FBI had concluded in 1965 that the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing had been committed by four known Ku Klux Klansmen, no legal proceedings ensued until 1977 when Robert Chambliss was tried and convicted of first degree murder. Thomas Edwin Blanton Jr. and Bobby Cherry were each convicted of four counts of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment in 2001 and 2002. Herman Cash, who died in 1994, was never charged.



### **Books:**

*Klansman's Manual*, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, 1924

*Stars Fell on Alabama*, Carl Cramer, 1934

*Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, W.E.B. DuBois, 1935

*Scottsboro Boy*, Haywood Patterson and Earl Conrad, 1950

*The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, C. Vann Woodward, 1955

*Know Alabama*, Lawrence Owsley, John Craig Stewart and Gordon T. Chappell, 1957

*Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, James Agee and Walker Evans, 1960

*The American Revolution*, James Boggs, 1963

*Down Home: Camden, Alabama*, Bob Adelman, 1972

*The Rebel Outlaw: Josey Wales*, Forrest Carter, 1973

*McIntosh and Weatherford, Creek Indian Leaders*, Benjamin W. Griffith, Jr., 1988

*And Their Children After Them*, Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson, 1989

*Poor But Proud, Alabama's Poor Whites*, Wayne Flynt, 1989

*Hammer and Hoe*, Robin D.G. Kelley, 1990

*From Selma to Sorrow, The Life and Death of Viola Liuzzo*, Mary Stanton, 1998

*BREACH OF PEACE*, Eric Etheridge, 2008

*Searching for Freedom after the Civil War*, G. Ward Hubbs, 2015



*Tree along the Trail of Tears (Bankhead Forest, Alabama)*

Photograph

4" x 5"

A number of trees form a grid of markers used along the Trail of Tears by Native people to point to hunting grounds, meeting places, water supplies and other sites important to survival.



*Shotgun house with me and Morgan*, 1968

Photograph

4½" x 4½"

In the late 1960s I did neighborhood organizing in the U.S. South.





*Rosa Parks, 1955*

Photograph

6½" x 8"

Rosa Parks was born Rosa Louise McCauley in Tuskegee, Alabama on February 4, 1913. On December 1, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama she refused to obey bus driver James Blake, who had ordered her to give up her seat in the "colored section" of the bus to a white passenger, after the white-only section was filled. She was fired from her job as a seamstress at a local department store, and received death threats for years after.



*FREEDOM NOW, 1960*

Object

1¼" diameter

Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was founded in 1942 by a group of 50 activists, one third of whom were Black while the rest were white, to protest racial segregation in the United States. During the spring of 1961, student activists from CORE launched the Freedom Rides.



*Waiting Room, 1937*

Union Depot, Montgomery, Alabama, cast iron, object

2¾" x 8"

The segregation and disenfranchisement laws known as Jim Crow laws made up a formal, codified system of racial apartheid enforced from 1890 until 1965. The laws affected almost every aspect of daily life, mandating segregation of schools, parks, libraries, drinking fountains, restrooms, buses, trains, and restaurants.

**Hallway:**



*Cartoon, 1868*

Woodcut, ink on paper

3½" x 4"

A cartoon published in the September 1, 1868 issue of the *Tuscaloosa Independent Monitor* sent a threat to Rev. A. S. Lakin, a carpetbagger from Ohio, who had just been elected President of the University of Alabama, and Dr. N. B. Cloud, a scalawag who was serving as Alabama's Superintendent of Public Instruction. The Klan's threats of violence terrorized Black and white Republicans. The editor of the *Tuscaloosa Independent Monitor*, Ryland Randolph, was also the leader of the local Ku Klux Klan. The title "City of Oaks" in the cartoon's heading refers to Tuscaloosa.



*Prison shirt (Limestone Correctional Facility)*

Hand-sewn cotton shirt

34" x 24" x 4½"

Current Federal Bureau of Justice statistics show the Alabama Department of Corrections holding 12,607 white inmates and 14,390 Black inmates. Alabama is one of several states that don't track the number of Hispanic people in state prisons, instead classifying them as white.

## Bedroom:



Mose Tolliver  
*Self-portrait*, 1985  
House paint on Masonite  
17" x 13½"

Mose Tolliver was born in the Pike Road community of Montgomery, Alabama on July 4, 1918. After a crippling industrial accident in the early 1970s, he began to paint. Sitting on his bed he would complete 8 to 10 paintings per day. He lived on the south side of Montgomery at 480 Sayre Street.



*Red Dirt Girl*  
Liner notes, ink on paper  
8¾" x 8¾"

Lyrics by Emmylou Harris. She was born in Birmingham, Alabama on April 2, 1947.



*GEES BEND*  
House paint on plywood  
15½" x 24"

The Gee's Bend Quilt Collective is a group of women who live or have lived along the Alabama River in the African-American community of Gee's Bend. Because of their geographic isolation they retained much of their African heritage. In the 1960s they became involved in the civil rights movement after members attended a talk by Martin Luther King, Jr. in nearby Camden.



*Two mules from Gee's Bend*, 1968  
Photograph  
2½" x 3¼"

Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee. On April 9, his casket was pulled through the streets of Atlanta with the help of two mules from Gee's Bend as part of a three-and-a-half-mile funeral procession.



Nathan Meier  
*Yellowhammer Woodpecker*  
Oil on panel  
4¾" x 6"

Alabama has been known as the "Yellowhammer State" since the Civil War. Yellowhammer was the nickname given to young Confederate soldiers in the Huntsville cavalry. Alabama's state bird is the Northern Flicker, also known as the Yellowhammer Woodpecker.



*Helen Keller, 1920*  
Photograph  
10" x 11¼"

Helen Adams Keller was born on June 27, 1880, in Tuscumbia, Alabama. She lost her sight and hearing after a bout of illness at the age of nineteen months. Keller went on to become a world-famous speaker and author.



*After Maggie Louise Gudger*  
Quilt, hand-sewn potato sacks  
63" x 81"

Maggie Louise Gudger is the pseudonym for Lucille Burroughs used by James Agee in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Agee found Lucy to be an intelligent young girl who wanted to be a teacher or nurse. Forsyth & Son Grocery in Anniston, Alabama is where the Freedom Riders were attacked and their bus set on fire. Twelve-year old Janie Forsyth brought the Freedom Riders water and gave aid. Her father helped plan the attack.



*After Missouri Pettway*  
Quilt, hand-sewn denim  
63" x 71"

Missouri Pettway was born in Gee's Bend, Alabama in 1902. She began making quilts out of necessity in the early 1920s. She gave birth to 12 children.



*Viola Liuzzo, 1959*

Photograph

8½" x 8¾"

Viola Liuzzo, from Detroit, helped register Black voters in Alabama. She was murdered by four members of the Ku Klux Klan. One of them was an FBI informant. Early on, J. Edgar Hoover led a campaign to tarnish her reputation. She was the only white woman known to have been killed during the Civil Rights Movement. Martin Luther King, Jr. attended her funeral.



*William Harbour, 1961*

Photograph

6" x 5¼"

William Harbour was expelled from Tennessee State University for participating in the Freedom Rides. In 1961 activists rode interstate buses into the segregated South to challenge the non-enforcement of a United States Supreme Court decision that ruled that segregated public buses were unconstitutional. Many of the riders, including Harbour, were illegally arrested.

## Out Building:

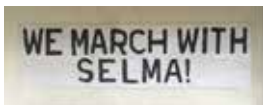


*U.S. Flag (22 stars)*

Object, hand-sewn denim with grommets

58" x 35"

Alabama became the 22nd state on December 14, 1819, followed by Maine on March 15, 1820. When the new flag was adopted on July 4, 1820, it had 23 stars. There was never a 22-star flag. Alabama's Constitution of 1901 disfranchised Black people and poor whites.



*WE MARCH WITH SELMA!*

House paint on plywood

24" x 88"

On March 7, 1965, John Lewis and Rev. Hosea Williams led 600 people on a planned march from Selma, Alabama to the state's capitol in Montgomery. Stopped, leaving Selma, by a gang of state police and white civilians on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they were attacked in a vicious display of white-supremacist violence. During the following weeks, numerous marches were held throughout the U.S. in protest. Edmund Pettus was born in Limestone County, Alabama on July 6, 1821. He became an officer in the Army of the Confederate States of America, and after the war was active in the Ku Klux Klan, serving as a Grand Dragon. From 1897 to 1907 he was a U.S. Senator representing Alabama. The bridge is still named after him.



Charlie Lucas

*Track*, 1986

House paint on plywood, HO train track, garden hose

38" x 48"

Charlie Lucas was born in Birmingham, Alabama on October 12, 1951. He was one of 14 children. He left school as a teenager and supported himself doing construction and with skills of the hand. His great-grandfather, a blacksmith, introduced him to art. Today his studio is in Selma, Alabama.



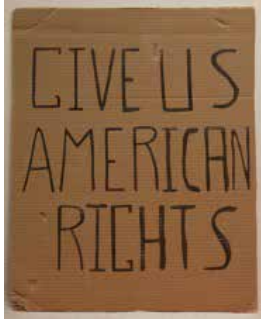
Nathan Meier

*Jim Crow*

Drawing, water color, color pencil

13" x 10"

The Jim Crow persona was a theater character created in 1828 by Thomas D. Rice who performed blackface and used African-American vernacular speech, song and dance to become one of the most popular minstrel-show entertainers of his time. The character was based on a folk trickster named Jim Crow who had been popular among Black slaves.



*GIVE US AMERICAN RIGHTS*

Marker on cardboard

27" x 22"



*Go Home Negro*

Marker on cardboard

28¼" x 16½"

Two protest signs from a demonstration held on April 20, 1960 outside of a Woolworth's lunch counter in the South.



Associated Press. [A white youth matched strides with a negro student picketing the F. W. Woolworth store in Greensboro, N.C.] April 20, 1960. Photograph. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (113.02.00)

# NOTICE!

## STOP

Help Save The Youth of America  
DON'T BUY NEGRO RECORDS

If you don't want to see negroes in your place of business, then do not buy negro records on your job box or from the negro records on the radio.

The screaming, staccato words and songs many of these records are advertising the morals of our white youth in America. Call the attention of the radio stations that play the type of music and compare to them.

Don't Let Your Children Buy, or Listen  
To These Negro Records

THE AMERICAN BROADCASTING COMPANY  
1000 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y.

### NOTICE!

Stack of 25 flyers, ink on paper

11" x 8½" x ¼"

In 1954, Alabama civil rights resistance groups began to form under the pretense of "states' rights." Known as White Citizen Councils, they were created by influential businessmen and landowners. In publications, speeches and statements, a concerted effort was made to distance their actions from the violent reprisals of the Ku Klux Klan, despite the groups being collaborators.



*After Evans (Lucille Burroughs)*

Photograph

7¼" x 9¾"

Lucille Burroughs was born into a white sharecropping family on February 2, 1926 in northern Hale County, Alabama. Married at 15, she divorced, married again and had four children. Her husband died young. She picked cotton and then waited tables. In 1971, she committed suicide by consuming rat poison.



*Winonah Margaret Beamer, 1961*

Photograph

7½" x 5½"

Winonah Margaret Beamer was one of the few white students at Central State College in Wilberforce, Ohio. She was arrested in Mississippi and spent the longest time in prison of all of the Freedom Riders. She refused to post bail or file an appeal, later saying, "I didn't think it would be recorded if no one had done the time."



*Work Boots*

Boots on metal grate

7" x 16" x 24"

My work boots after walking a dirt road near Camden, Alabama.



*Cotton sack, circa 1930*

Object

26½" x 90" x 1"

Sack used by sharecroppers for picking cotton.





*GOD SAID THE WORLD COME TO A END*, 2018

Photograph

16" x 12<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>"

William Carlton Rice began creating his Cross Garden around his home near Prattville, Alabama in 1970.

**Notes:**

*Special Election*, printed by Robert Danner, commissioned by the artist.

*Nathan Bedford Forrest, In memory of, Yellowhammer Woodpecker, and Jim Crow* drawn and painted by Nathan Meier, commissioned by the artist.

Thanks to O-Town House and neugerriemschneider.

For further press information and imagery, please contact Jan Salewski at neugerriemschneider: +49 30 288 77277, [jan@neugerriemschneider.com](mailto:jan@neugerriemschneider.com); or Scott Cameron Weaver at O-Town House: +1 213 263 9428, [home@o-townhouse.art](mailto:home@o-townhouse.art).