

Lorraine: As museum opens, protester still cries 'sellout'

► Continued from M1

gia legislator Julian Bond, and Coretta Scott King, who once balked at the notion of turning the motel into anything except a pile of rubble.

At first, the museum sounded like a tacky cross between Atlanta's King Center and Disney World, with visitors suffering simulated indignities and racial insults from a cast of life-size dummies. What steered the exhibits toward legitimacy and good taste was advice from noted historians, civil rights pioneers and experts from the Smithsonian Institution.

But state Circuit Judge D'Army Bailey, 49, the driving force behind the motel-turned-museum, stubbornly insisted that the laser remain.

"No way the laser was going," he says. "No way. To me, that represents the eternal light. Having it shoot toward the heavens is symbolic. It means the dream isn't dead. It means he may have fallen here, but his spirit lives on. Hell, I want people to be able to see that damn laser miles away."

Different views of the dream

Judge Bailey is not the only King disciple fighting to keep a vision of the dream alive.

Memphis born and raised, he is a prime example of the success that the movement helped some African-Americans achieve: expensive house in a posh, integrated neighborhood, fine car (a Jaguar), degrees from Clark University (Worcester, Mass.) and Yale, great job, social, political and economic clout. A master of his universe.

Then there's his most stubborn opponent over the museum: Jacqueline Smith, 40, who has been protesting the project since she and the other few Lorraine tenants were evicted in March 1988. Until then, she lived and worked at the motel as a book-keeper, desk clerk, maid and part-time tour guide.

Miss Smith represents the flip side, the dream deferred. Her world: a spot on the sidewalk across from the motel, second-hand clothing, little money, worn-out shoes, no job, protesting for the rights of the disadvantaged. She is Don Quixote and the Lorraine her windmill.

The old motel brings them together, and keeps them apart. "This place, this spot, shouldn't be remembered as the place where Dr. King died," Judge Bailey says. "It should be remembered as the place where the dream is being kept alive."

Miss Smith agrees that the dream should be kept alive. "We don't need another museum," she says, sitting in front of a sign that reads "D'ARMY IS A SELLOUT" in big red, painted letters. "Around here, we need affordable housing, health-care centers, day-care centers.

"Look at it this way. They don't want tourist attractions in the ghetto. So you know what? The ghetto has got to go."

Miss Smith, who has a court order keeping Judge Bailey away because she got tired of him "trying to sell her on the museum,"



Judge D'Army Bailey, with a bus from the Freedom Ride exhibit, has been the driving force behind the museum.

has no plans to end her one-woman vigil, even when the museum opens to the public Aug. 31.

"This is not what Dr. King died for," she says. "I don't see how D'Army Bailey and the people behind the museum can live with themselves."

'To keep the fires burning'

Memphis has been living with the death of Dr. King for 23 years. Racial tension simmered below the surface in 1968 when he came to help striking sanitation workers. Though the population is almost evenly split between black and white, Memphis has never elected a black mayor. Poverty, drug-related violence and unemployment still are major problems in the black community.

The Lorraine was central to the black community in Memphis even before the civil rights era. The motel was one of the few places where blacks could get a room. Dr. King stayed at the motel several times, as did Count Basie, Lionel Hampton, Aretha Franklin and Jackie Robinson.

During the decades after Dr. King's death, the motel became a dilapidated eyesore. Still, tour buses and out-of-town visitors flocked by to snap pictures or simply to look.

Although many local officials wished the motel would just go away, the tourists kept coming.

Judge Bailey was almost a tourist the first time he drove past the Lorraine after years away from Memphis as a student up North and then as a lawyer in California. Inspired when he heard Dr. King speak during his college years, the former student protester thought that seeing the motel again would be a way to honor him.

The motel, he found, was surrounded by drugs and decay, prostitutes and pimps.

"It was more like a blight on Memphis and the whole civil rights movement," Judge Bailey says. "And I was determined to change that."



Jacqueline Smith, a former Lorraine desk clerk, has protested the museum for more than two years. The sign sums up her low opinion of Judge Bailey.

In 1982, Judge Bailey and the Lorraine Foundation, a non-profit group of investors, bought the motel for \$144,000 at a foreclosure sale. Plans to turn the motel into a museum bogged down several times, but finally a funding agreement was struck, with the state, Memphis and Shelby County paying almost all of the \$9.25 million cost.

Constant rain and cost overruns forced the foundation to push the opening date back from July to August. (The dedication ceremonies still will be July 4.) At one point, Miss Smith's presence on the site was blamed for slowing construction crews. A judge eventually ordered her to

move across the street, 50 feet from the site.

Oddly enough, the Lorraine became a rallying point for Memphis and the movement.

"Frankly, the statement being made here is more important than one of an economic nature," Memphis Mayor Richard Hackett says. "The statement is that Memphis wants to be a major player in documenting the success and achievements of individuals involved in the civil rights movement."

Memphis officials already are running a trolley line through the area to better connect it with downtown.

"This is something that can

keep the fires burning," says the Rev. Hooks, who serves on the museum's board of directors. "For folks who are too young to remember the movement, this will be the perfect teacher. For those who have firsthand memories like myself, it'll be like going home. It'll be somewhere we can go to recharge our batteries."

Even Mrs. King, who once called the proposed project "morbid" and threatened to sue over the planned use of her husband's name, appears content with the outcome. She will speak Tuesday at the "Salute to Legends" banquet at Memphis's Peabody Hotel.

"We just couldn't let the site go," says the Rev. Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. "Some of our most precious blood was shed there."

This is what Memphis needs'

Across the street from the site, Jacqueline Smith sits behind a table covered with remnants of Dr. King, the idol she never met.

Born and raised in Memphis, she once was a promising contralto who auditioned for New York's Metropolitan Opera. Bad luck and personal setbacks killed her singing career.

Her battle against the museum has made her a reluctant celebrity, with stories appearing on national news shows and in major publications.

People from Panola, Miss., to New York have come to see Miss Smith. She keeps a bulky scrapbook of newspaper clippings, photos and autographs of folks who have dropped by to lend moral support, from rappers Public Enemy to former first daughter Amy Carter.

The books and photos on Miss Smith's protest table are not for sale. They are for people to read.

"Dr. King didn't do what he did for money," she says. "You know, some people have asked me about joining in on the protest. But I like being out here alone because I can control myself. I can't control others. I mean, it has been rough, but I'm not giving up."

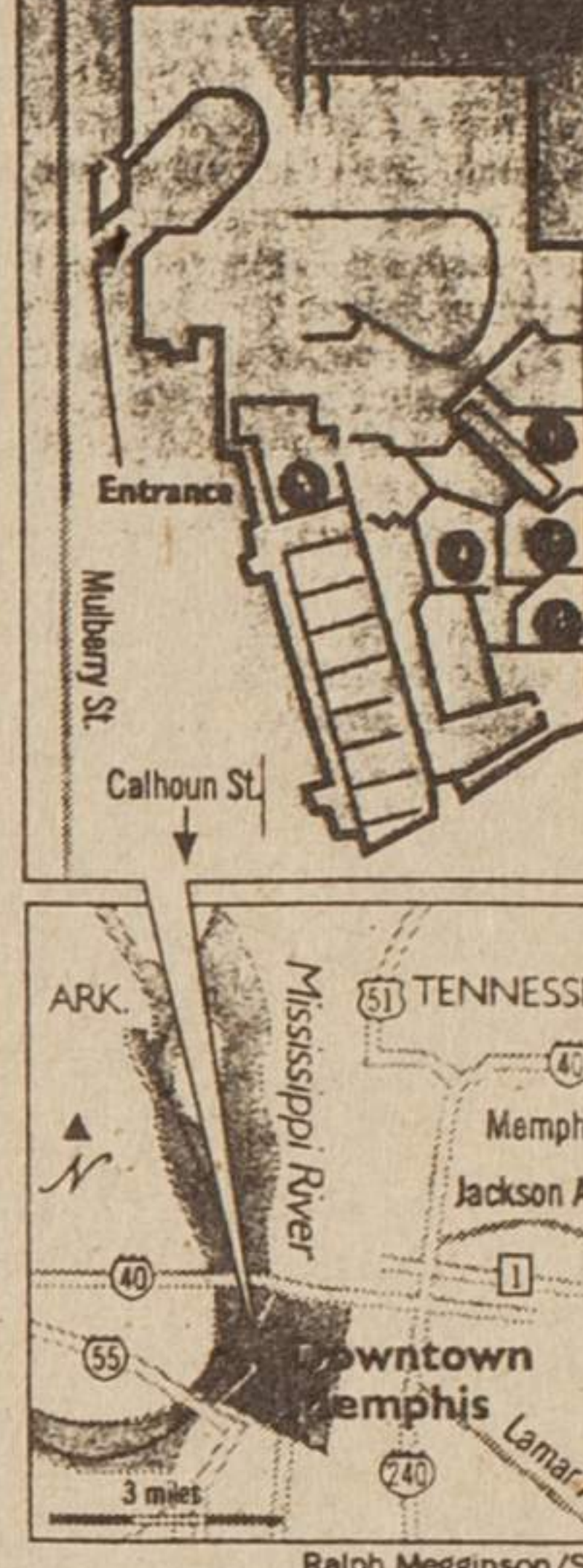
D'Army Bailey doesn't expect her to.

"Jackie is a very determined individual, and I admire her for that," he says. "But she's wrong on this one. Very wrong."

"If we had turned the Lorraine into public housing or, say, a hospital, sure it would have helped. But that would have been limited. Now we have the potential to inspire and educate everyone, black and white. And who knows? The statement is that Memphis wants to be a major player in documenting the success and achievements of individuals involved in the civil rights movement."

Miss Smith thinks the issue is not about what the museum, the movement or Memphis needs.

"This is about Dr. King's dream," she says. "His dream of helping the poor and disadvantaged. That's what I heard him say, heard him preach. Maybe the museum people heard something different."



Seat yourself at back of bus to feel history

Designed to have a "you are there" feel (or "in-ya-face" in some cases), the National Civil Rights Museum uses photos, videos, recordings, memorabilia, scale models and authentic items to dramatize 14 moments from the movement. The exhibits run from the Supreme Court's 1954 school desegregation ruling to the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Here's a look at some highlights:

► **Montgomery bus boycott.** Climb aboard a restored city bus, take a seat up front and hear an irritable driver order, "Move to the back," the message that Rosa Parks (represented by a real plaster statue in the front) and countless other Southern blacks heard before the boycott began Dec. 5, 1955. It ended Dec. 21, 1956, with a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that Alabama bus segregation was unconstitutional.

► **Student sit-ins.** A restored department store lunch counter is populated with life-size statues of student protesters. Sit down among them and watch sweeping video screens and audio material from the 1960 campaign.

► **Freedom rides.** A burned-out vintage Greyhound bus recalls the 1961 firebombing near Anniston, Ala. Details of the riders' attempts to desegregate interstate travel come from photos and eyewitness accounts.

► **Birmingham.** A life-size video environment puts visitors in the middle of the 1963 conflict between civil rights protesters and police. It comes complete with snarling dogs, fire hoses, racist crowds and former police Commissioner "Bull" Connor on bullhorn. Also on display are a replica of Dr. King's jail cell (where he wrote his famous "Letter From a Birmingham Jail") and the worn leather briefcase that attorney Arthur Shores used to smuggle it out.

► **Rooms 306 and 307.** Forming the emotional heart of the museum, the room that Dr. King occupied (307) and the room he stepped in front of on the balcony (306) have been restored to 1968 form, down to the furniture, linen and design. A laser beam traces the bullet's path, then shoots straight through a metal wreath toward the heavens.

The dedication ceremony is set for 11 a.m. Thursday at the museum, 450 Mulberry St., Memphis. Special guests include Rosa Parks, Julian Bond, Benjamin Hooks and Tennessee Gov. Ned McWherter. Memphis-born actress Cybill Shepherd and actor Blair Underwood ("L.A. Law") will be masters of ceremonies. The museum will be open for free tours 10 a.m.-5 p.m. through Sunday. It will then close for completion of the exhibits and reopen permanently Aug. 31. 901-521-9699.

The search for Klan robes and riot gear

By Keith L. Thomas
Staff writer

The Ku Klux Klan robe (white, 100 percent cotton) came from an African-American collector who looked for such a garment for years. He decided it was just too "creepy" to keep.

The garbage truck, the classic cylinder-shaped one used during the 1968 strike that drew Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to town, came from a Memphis salvage yard.

Tracking down original items from the civil rights movement takes skill, determination and, perhaps more importantly, dumb luck.

"It's very much like being a detective," says Gay Clemenson, 44, a researcher with Eisterholdlewellyn Exhibit Services, the Kansas City firm charged with finding authentic memorabilia for the National Civil Rights Museum.

It's no easy task. "Can you imagine calling up someone and asking if they have a Klan robe they'd like to sell?" Mrs. Clemenson asks.

For 2½ years, the people at

Eisterholdlewellyn (named after the founding partners) have been scouring the nation — especially the South — for items from the civil rights era. Among the things they've unearthed:

► Riot gear used by Memphis police during the 1968 strike by sanitation workers.

► A "Freedom Ride" button.

► A 1965 handbill advertising a Selma-to-Montgomery march for voting rights.

► An FBI poster soliciting information about the deaths in 1964 of James Cheney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman in Mississippi.

► Pews from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where Dr. King served as pastor in the mid-1950s.

► Rarely seen local TV footage of the desegregation disturbance at Central High School in Little Rock, Ark.

Like the best gumshoes, the company sent queries to the usual suspects — about 200 collectors and history buffs nationwide. The final list of contributors ran the gamut: local and national museums, police departments, public libraries, prin-

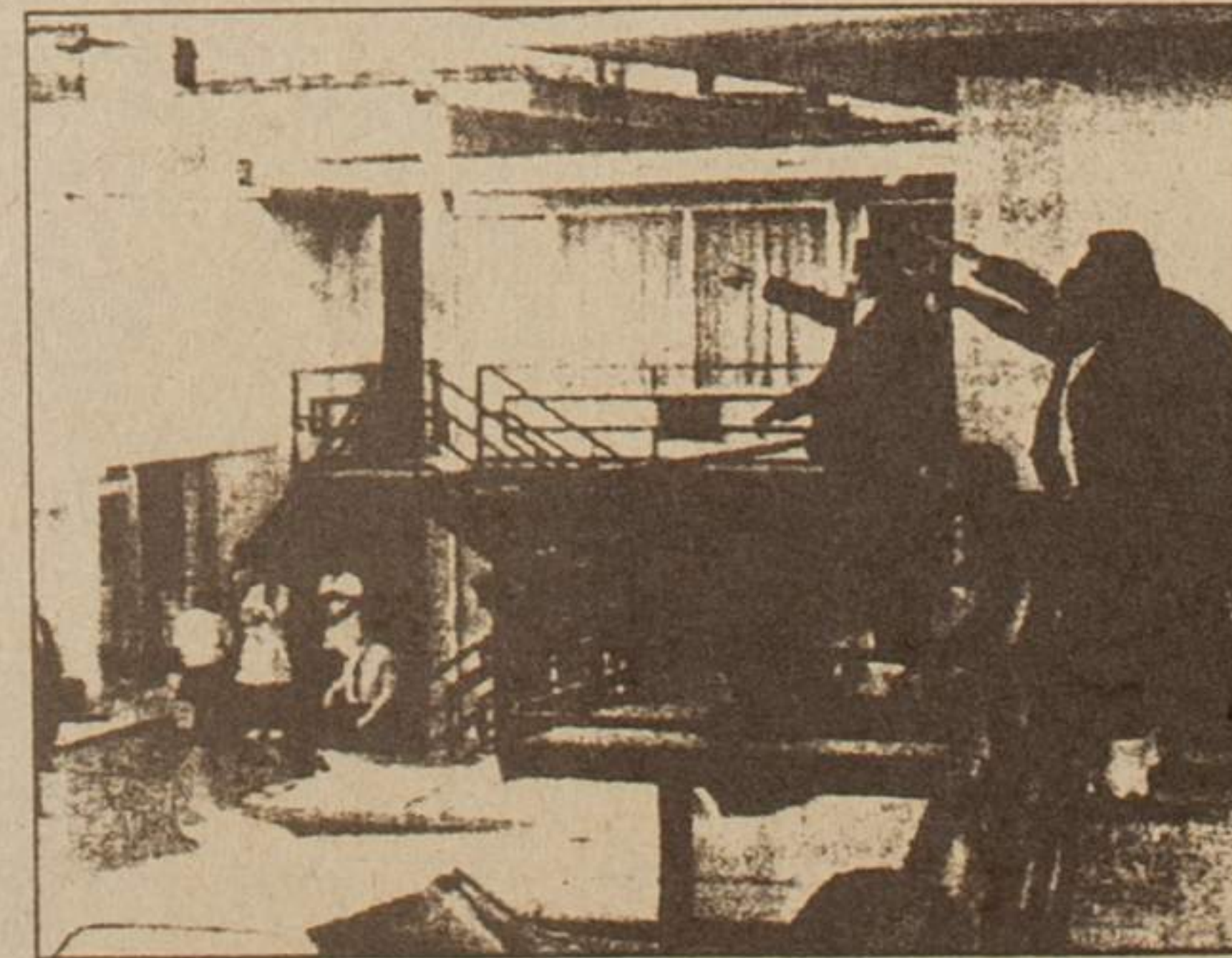
cipal movement figures, churches, everyday citizens.

A little less than a third of the museum's \$9.25 million budget was spent on the collection and re-creations. About 1,200 items have been assembled, with stuff still pouring in.

"Some people were more than happy to donate things," Mrs. Clemenson said. "Others were a bit reluctant. I think some people are beginning to realize the historical value of these items."

Many already understand the dollar value. One news-photo service quoted prices of \$400 to \$3,000 for a vintage image. A TV station wanted \$15 for each second of film. The asking price for a slightly used Klan robe, complete with hood: about \$300.

Items that couldn't be secured — such as Dr. King's Birmingham jail cell, reportedly stored in a warehouse and definitely not for sale — had to be re-created. That was the job of Design and Production Inc., a Virginia firm that has worked on everything from the Carter Presidential Library to Universal



The Associated Press

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was shot at the Lorraine Motel, now a museum, Studios' King Kong exhibit.

"It really wasn't that hard fabricating some of these items," says project manager Alan Lepp. "For things like the Edmund Pettus Bridge replica and Central High School facade, we had the actual structures to work from."

Other times, the museum used a stand-in. For example, the lunch counter from the Greensboro, N.C., Woolworth's — where

four students staged a historic sit-in in 1960 — wasn't available. Mrs. Clemenson says a North Carolina museum has dibs.

Design and Production Inc. ended up getting vintage stools from a Woolworth's in Kansas City and an old lunch counter from the city's downtown Macy's. Both were authentic in a way. Like Greensboro, downtown Kansas City, was the site of student sit-ins.