

Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter now, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Catherine Williams

April 17, 2012

The Great Speckled Bird and Atlanta Counterculture in the Vietnam War Era

by

Catherine Williams

Walter Reed
Adviser

English Department

Walter Reed
Adviser

Allen Tullos
Committee Member

Sally Wolff King
Committee Member

The Great Speckled Bird and Atlanta Counterculture in the Vietnam War Era

By

Catherine Williams

Walter Reed
Adviser

An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

English Department

2012

Abstract

The Great Speckled Bird and Atlanta Counterculture in the Vietnam War Era
By Catherine Williams

The Great Speckled Bird, an Atlanta-based publication that ran from 1968 to 1976, embodied the spirit of the city's Vietnam War-era protest culture. Politics drove the journalism of *The Bird*, but the Atlanta music scene and pieces of stunning visual art featured largely in the publication as well. The Atlanta counterculture movement during *The Bird's* lifetime blurred the boundaries between politics, music, and art; music and art expressed political opinions, while political movements relied on musicians and artists to convey ideas. *The Great Speckled Bird* represents this synthesis of politics, music, and art within its pages, and also retains its connection to the city of Atlanta and the culture of the South. Even when addressing issues of national importance, *The Bird* makes connections to Atlanta, emphasizing the paper's role within the community. As a guidebook for new music, groundbreaking artwork, protests and movement-related events, as well as serving as a reliable news source, *The Great Speckled Bird* gave progressive Atlantans and their counterculture movement a voice.

The Great Speckled Bird and Atlanta Counterculture in the Vietnam War Era

By

Catherine Williams

Walter Reed
Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

English Department

2012

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One	7
Chapter Two	22
Chapter Three	52
Works Cited	64
Non-Printed Sources	66

Figures

Figure 1	31
Figure 2	33
Figure 3	35
Figure 4	42
Figure 5	47
Figure 6	51
Figure 7	54
Figure 8	61

INTRODUCTION

On the front page of the inaugural issue of *The Great Speckled Bird*, Tom Coffin states that *The Bird*'s mission is to “bitch and badger, carp and cry, and perhaps give Atlanta (and environs, ‘cause we’re growing, baby) a bit of honest and interesting and, we trust, even readable journalism” (T. Coffin 1). *The Great Speckled Bird* not only reported on the happenings around Atlanta and the nation amid the volatile climate of the late sixties and early seventies, but also gave the protest culture of the time – whether hippies, left-wingers, or those fed up with the way things were going – a voice. The form that *The Bird* took, a legally-printed, professionally-compiled newspaper, made that voice even stronger. For the “bitch[ing] and badger[ing], carp[ing] and cry[ing]” evolved from a job of kids with poster boards and stoned musicians hanging around midtown Atlanta to eloquent and organized expressions in a bona fide newspaper. A well-crafted product, *The Bird* maintained a commitment to outspoken and often controversial views, made even more striking in newsprint. In Coffin’s front-page statement, the writer and *Bird* founder asserts the seriousness of this new endeavor: he does not simply attach his name to his statement, but signs the mission in ink at the close of the article, birthing *The Great Speckled Bird* into Atlanta’s counterculture movement.

The Great Speckled Bird thrived as an Atlanta weekly newspaper from 1968 to 1976, with staff writers and other *Bird* enthusiasts selling the papers on the streets of midtown Atlanta and on university and high school campuses across the city. *The Bird* devoted its pages to politics and counterculture, including topics from rock music to cross-dressing strippers (Huff). The paper’s unfalteringly leftist stance made it an example of a radical influence in the eyes of the conservatives at the time, and therefore *The Bird* became a target of lawsuits, protests, and

even, in 1972, a firebombing. *The Great Speckled Bird* was not simply a do-it-yourself project by a group local young people, even if that may be how it got its start; rather, due to the dedication of *The Bird* staff and especially after becoming the largest paid weekly newspaper in Georgia in the summer of 1972, *The Bird* posed a threat to the establishment with an voice that resisted silencing (Huff).

A reading of *The Bird*'s archives makes clear the publication's groundbreaking nature. From the images on its covers to the unconventional forms of its articles, *The Great Speckled Bird* more closely resembles a work of art than a weekly newspaper. A visit to the DeKalb History Center's 2011-2012 exhibit devoted to *The Great Speckled Bird* proves that some of its content is considered too controversial even today; curse words in articles and exposed private parts are covered up with black tape. Reassuringly, though, some rebels and free-thinkers still exist out there: one piece of tape is peeled back to share an Allman brother's genitalia with museum visitors.

The Great Speckled Bird piqued my interest back in my teenage years, as I wanted to spend a high school summer working or interning with a local, counterculture press. There must be some sort of cool and anti-establishment, cultural and political publication in Atlanta, I thought. I can still remember when my Google search revealed *The Great Speckled Bird*: perfect. Unfortunately, I arrived thirty-some years too late. Since that moment in front of my iBook, I wondered why nothing like *The Great Speckled Bird* exists in my city anymore. Between the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and the emergence of people from Sarah Palin to Taylor Swift, the twenty-first century could certainly use an outlet to "bitch and badger, carp and cry" – so why don't we have one?

As this is an English thesis, I will focus on the literary aspects of *The Bird* rather than attempting a psychological study of the youth of Atlanta, but I hope to come to some conclusions about the lack of a literary creation such as *The Bird* today. I will explore the significance of music within the pages of *The Great Speckled Bird*, as well as music's role in the Atlanta movement and in protest culture in general. Reviews and discussions of music exist alongside political, cultural, and literary pieces in *The Great Speckled Bird*, and likewise music historically goes hand-in-hand with political movements; in *Politics in Music*, Emory professor Courtney Brown quotes Plato's statement that "the modes of music are never disturbed without unsettling of the most fundamental political and social conventions" (Brown 1). A discussion of the political and social relevance of music created and performed in Atlanta and the Deep South during the run of *The Bird* will be found together with my more literary analysis throughout this paper.

Artwork, too, will play a part in my discussion of the newspaper. Visual art needs to be included in this project because of its prominence in *The Great Speckled Bird*, and it will enhance my explorations of text. The artwork found in *The Bird* is so spectacular that it simply seems wrong to leave it out. To enrich my analysis of the artwork and visual layout of *The Bird*, I met with Stephanie Coffin, founding staff member and the key creator of *The Bird*'s artistic design, at the DeKalb History Center's *Great Speckled Bird* exhibit on April 3, 2012. She walked me through many of the covers on display, and discussed their artistic significance and the decisions behind cover art and the art within the paper. Mrs. Coffin's contributions to the project give my analysis of the paper's visually artistic elements a personal account that I find extremely valuable to my overall discussion.

The focus of my thesis is the role of place in the creation of *The Great Speckled Bird*. Its creation, dissemination, and attack all took place in Atlanta, and *The Bird* maintains its Atlanta identity with every issue. *The Bird* addressed issues of national significance, but never allowed itself to exist separately from the city it called home. While the American “hippie” and counterculture movements around the Vietnam War era, particularly those in San Francisco and New York, have received great attention in cultural and historical media, the progressive, counterculture writing, music, and other artistic endeavors that took place in Atlanta during this era seem to have all but vanished from consciousness. *The Great Speckled Bird* embodies the spirit of Atlanta protests against the war, “the man,” and injustice, and the embracing of music, literature, and maybe a few drugs. My examination of *The Bird* serves as a representation of the counterculture in Atlanta during the Vietnam War era.

Since terms like “counterculture,” “underground,” and “protest” have already surfaced in this paper, I will begin my discussion with a basic definition of these strong but rather nebulous words and an explanation of the way in which I use them. The first chapter of my thesis addresses how such words are used to label both underground papers and the Vietnam War-era youth movement, and how they apply or do not apply to *The Great Speckled Bird*. I then explore the nature of national protest and counterculture movements and the publications that they produced, and compare those creations to Atlanta’s *Great Speckled Bird* and culture of the South.

Chapter Two, the longest section of my thesis, explores the writing, advertisements, and visual elements found in *The Great Speckled Bird*, and addresses the content’s uniqueness to Atlanta. This exploration spans a number of years, topics, and authors. This section and mode of discussion will weave in music and visual aspects of *The Bird* and the Atlanta protest scene as

well, creating a comprehensive look into what made *The Bird* and protest culture in Atlanta a product of place. The music of the Hampton Grease Band and *Bird* founding staff member Stephanie Coffin's thoughts on cover art and visual layouts take particular prominence in Chapter Two. I also analyze one of og, king of bashan's "Foibles to Ade People," titled "Maybe, Virginia, and Then Again, Maybe Not," my favorite written piece in all of *The Great Speckled Bird*'s archives (merry christmas of bashan 10).

Finally, in Chapter Three, I attempt an explanation as to why *The Great Speckled Bird* thrived during its too-short lifetime, and also explore possible reasons as to why a publication like *The Bird* cannot survive in Atlanta today. For this section, I incorporate literature, politics, and music. I also delve into what youth counterculture in Atlanta looks like today, and how the connotations of "counterculture" and "protest" have changed since *The Bird*'s inception in 1968. This chapter contains my own observations alongside outside critical sources.

I should point out that one way in which *The Great Speckled Bird* broke traditional norms of the newspaper industry involved citing the names of its contributors. All writers' and artists' names appear in lowercase letters in the newspaper, and because I wish to treat *The Bird* as any literary text, I stay true to this untraditional name formatting throughout my thesis. When referring to writers in the context of specific pieces in the paper, I use the lowercase style found in the text of *The Bird*. When I reference biographical information or personal interviews, I use traditional capitalization. The lack of capitalization of some proper names may look odd, but I believe that leaving them as they appeared in *The Bird* gives appropriate respect to the paper's formatting decisions.

Additionally, in my discussion of the visual aspects of *The Great Speckled Bird*, I incorporate images from the newspaper into the text of my paper. I employ this format to make

referencing the images easier for the reader, and to keep the look of the images as consistent with *The Bird's* layout as possible. The incorporation of images from the paper into my text mimics *The Bird's* strategy of blending written content with visually interesting elements, and therefore my thesis aims to provide the reader with an experience similar to reading an issue of *The Great Speckled Bird*.

I hope that my thesis shines a little more light on the great *Great Speckled Bird*. I agree with Stephanie Coffin's lament that the paper "is not given its due place" in the study of the counterculture movement of the Vietnam War era and the underground publications that came out of it (S. Coffin). Since discovering the publication and its passing, I find *The Bird* an entrancing piece of literary and cultural history, and feel honored that I get to write about it. I only wish it still existed as an active newspaper so that I could actually write *for* it.

CHAPTER ONE

Despite its inception in the middle of the Vietnam War and the abundance of politically-based material within its pages, *The Great Speckled Bird* cannot be classified as merely a political newspaper. *The Bird* took on social and cultural ideas, issues, and events, and featured not only news-style articles, but also embraced short stories, “foibles,” and visual representations as means of communication. It made use of literary and art forms rarely found in contemporary newspapers, even those considered revolutionary, and although the content of such creative pieces often contained some sort of political message, they existed beyond political commentary and redefined what a newspaper could be. *The Bird* featured ads for and reviews of local and touring bands, as well as coffee houses and other youth-friendly hangouts in Atlanta, serving as a guide for the city’s hip young generation as they discovered what it meant to live in opposition to the mainstream in the heart of the South. *The Great Speckled Bird* is an example of a phenomenon that took hold among youth all over American during the Vietnam War: the dawning of the underground press, but, more importantly, the birth of protest culture.

Counterculture publications across the country featured music as a major area of interest and importance, highlighting the significance of records and concerts in the life of the typical Vietnam War-era youth. A 1972 article by James E. Harmon in *Youth & Society* cites a 1970 study by R.S. Denisoff and M.H. Levine on the dominant ideologies found in the era’s abundance of new music releases. The study reported that the music did not necessarily convey a political message, as many outsiders to the movement might assume, but that it maintained an overwhelmingly anti-establishment quality (Harmon 61). The label “anti-establishment” assigned to a work or body of work suggests that its creation did not occur in response to a

particular political decision, movement, or injustice, but rather that its production reacted to the established political and social majority – and the culture that accompanies it – as a whole.

Harmon asserts that the actions and creative outlets of early 1970's youth and their rejection of the older generation and its politics “might be more profitably examined in terms of life styles and cultural movement rather than conventional political ideologies” (Harmon 61). Although this article deals more directly with music than with written publications, the same concept applies to *The Great Speckled Bird*. As noted, music, along with visual arts and other creative expressions, did not exist separately from publications such as *The Bird* (and vice versa) because each element existed in relation to the others, inspiring and feeding off of one another. The writers and readers of *The Great Speckled Bird* went to shows at the Twelfth Gate, Alex Cooley's Electric Ballroom, and the Catacombs Coffee House; they listened to the sometimes-radical rock of radio stations WRFG and WPLO; they made and embraced art as a kind of poetic expression. The young people who were involved with *The Great Speckled Bird* not only focused on the literary aspects of their day, but also sought inextricable involvement in an entire culture of protest and anti-establishmentarianism around Atlanta. *The Great Speckled Bird* demonstrates that although the Vietnam War-era youth culture in Atlanta and beyond sought involvement in political matters, their left-leaning viewpoints represent protest culture, not exclusively political protest. The youth of this time period acted and created in protest to the beliefs and the overall way of being of the older, established culture (Harmon 61-62).

In a 1969 article in *The Antioch Review*, Jesse Kornbluth discusses the phenomenon of youth counterculture with a particular emphasis on the revolutionary press. Kornbluth argues that youth counterculture became its own brand of popular culture, and therefore just as much a part of the establishment as the social and political traditions that they rejected (Kornbluth 92).

Kornbluth explores the elements that define youth counterculture and the way in which it is represented in the underground, or as he calls it, “revolutionary” and even “hip,” press (Kornbluth 94). By Kornbluth’s standards, a paper like *The Great Speckled Bird* did not fit the definition of “underground” because it incorporated traditional advertising, paid its employees, and relied on a printing company to create the product. In hindsight, the folks at *The Bird* agree with this classification; when giving a tour of *The Great Speckled Bird* exhibit at the DeKalb History Center in 2011, former staff members Bob Goodman and Steve Wise stated that *The Bird* really was not technically underground at all because they were open and forthcoming with regard to the paper’s creation. In a 2012 phone interview, founding *Bird* editor Gene Guerrero, Jr. joked, “We were a bit full of ourselves in thinking that we were underground” (Guerrero). He continued to say, however, that the political climate out of which *The Bird* came created a tumultuous feeling for young people. There was a real fear for youth in the country that under the Nixon administration, the military could take over, and that the press that young people wanted to read and create would have to be truly underground. “At the time, we thought the government was corrupt and wrong and repressive. But we weren’t as close to cataclysm as we thought,” Guerrero recalls (Guerrero).

Kornbluth argues that at the height of the countercultural press, people came together over music, marijuana, and love, and that politics was just an afterthought. A movement emerged out of shared interests and a shared desire to say something – in a variety of media – about the world (Kornbluth 94). The beauty of this new wave of press, whether classified as counterculture, underground, hip, or revolutionary, was that the youth who created these papers could call an original and pretty cool creation their own. In his words, “For the first time, a lot of young people had the same sense of life. And the same message came to many: It's beautiful.

You can do more to enjoy it. And free yourselves, because the Crazies control the planet” (Kornbluth 95).

The novelty of an underground production became so popular that counterculture papers started popping up all over the place. Kornbluth argues that “for \$200, almost anyone could start a paper, and almost anyone did” (Kornbluth 95). Because of the relative affordability and wide visibility of a small-scale newspaper, this form became the standard genre of expression for young, left wing, experimental, hip, creative types. Kornbluth cites *The Berkeley Barb*, the *Boston Avatar*, and *The San Francisco Express-Times* as underground newspapers that blended into one another due to the same kinds of stories, selling out to advertisers and sensational “news,” and blasé graphic layouts (Kornbluth 96). The beauty of the underground press began to fade when the specific brand of counterculture publication became too hip to remain below the surface of the mainstream, and the underground press looked more like the established newspaper system. And Kornbluth made these assumptions in 1969; *The Great Speckled Bird* was not even one year old, and its run would last for six more.

In *The Making of a Counterculture*, Theodore Roszak sees the youth of the movement not as caught up in a fad, but as the driving force for political and social change. He writes:

It is at the level of youth that significant social criticism now looks for a responsive hearing as, more and more, it grows to be the common expectation that the young should be those who act, who make things happen, who take the risks, who generally provide the ginger. (Roszak 1)

Rozzak’s study of the creation of the American counterculture begins with the role of youth. He considers youth receptive and willing to change, and sees their ability to bring forth positive action as more promising than that of their older counterparts. He describes youth as

“providing the ginger,” or giving spice to politics and social situations and the state of the nation in general. As Kornbluth suggests, social criticism became a trendy pastime for America’s youth in the Vietnam War era, but Roszak reminds the reader of the groundbreaking zeal with which the youth took on the call for political and social change.

One of the most prominent breeding grounds for counterculture movements and creations during the Vietnam War era was the college campus. In a 1976 article for the *American Sociological Review*, James L. Spates discusses the issues affecting middle-class students that sparked the need to adopt a set of values and beliefs in opposition to dominant culture. According to Spates, two major issues set the youth protest voice into action in the mid-1960’s: the regulation of student dress, activities, and other modes of self-expression on the part of universities, and the Vietnam War (Spates 870). Spates recalls that students organized with very little organized direction, working not toward a specific goal or means of change but rather embracing anything and everything that stood against the widely accepted tenets of the establishment. Once the image of the “hippie” surfaced in popular media – an image that Spates describes as embodying “flamboyance, youth, and marketability” – even college kids with trust funds identified with the hippie persona (Spates 870).

The widespread adoption of hippie-ness led to the creation of hippie communities, and within these communities, the initial potent political-mindedness of the protest movement tended to wane. Spates quotes Fred Davis, who explains that the movement ditched politics in favor of “expressiveness for its own sake” (Spates 870). The literature created at this time shifted in character from more political- and rights-based protests to the spread of the hippie culture. As Spates describes, the writing of the Vietnam War-era student movement began with the purpose of attaining some end goal, such as a university’s acceptance of flamboyant clothing, non-

traditional piercings, and student-led sit-ins, or the United States' political powers-that-be calling the troops home from Vietnam. With the movement's shift to hippie-spirited communities, however, the orientation of printed materials became expressive. In the ideology of expressive printed materials, a piece of writing or artwork does not seek to bring about a long term goal for political or social change, but rather sees the only purpose for the creation as the immediate response to and emotions evoked from the creative representation. The endpoint of a creative message and the primary reaction to it are one in the same (Spates 871).

The Great Speckled Bird came out of a more politically-minded movement than the hippie environment that Spates describes. In a 2012 interview, founding editor Gene Guerrero, Jr. described the fear of the draft present in any young man "born at the wrong age," and the belief that the United States was "close to cataclysm" (Guerrero). Theodore Roszak substantiates Guerrero's view of politics as the motivation behind the youth movement and the underground press in his timely 1969 *The Making of a Counterculture*. Roszak describes the era's emerging political climate that "pits a militant minority of dissenting youth against the sluggish consensus-and-coalition politics of their middle-class elders." The "dissenting youth" of America saw the draft as turn toward political disaster, and perceived the underground press as an outlet to express their political voices (Roszak 2).

The youth movement served as the uniting thread for underground press outlets throughout the United States at this time. Underground papers, no matter what city produced them, existed as one piece of a bigger picture of underground culture. The Underground Press Syndicate came about in 1966 to unify America's underground papers. In *The Paper Revolutionaries*, Laurence Leamer describes the connotations of *underground* as avant-garde, dangerous, and full of mystique. The Syndicate appealed to politically radical and culturally hip

papers alike; it created an umbrella to cover the wide range of youth publications and to give a concrete name to their movement (Leamer 41). Thus, even though according to Kornbluth and *The Great Speckled Bird* writers *The Bird* was not officially underground, it fell under the Underground Press Syndicate and therefore I will continue to describe it as underground.

Despite the extensive adoption of the title “underground press” in 1966, the *East Village Other*, one of the era’s most famous underground papers, did not consider itself a paper by 1967; that classification felt too narrow. Managing editor Allen Katzman told a reporter, “We’re no community paper. We’re a worldwide movement for art, peace, civil rights, morality in politics” (Leamer 51). According to Katzman, the *East Village Other* was not simply a part of the movement, but was a movement in itself. His description of “art, peace, civil rights, morality in politics” demonstrates the expansion of the *East Village Other* from a politically-charged piece of print journalism to a product with a life of its own, an entity that at once embodied the hip culture around it and expressed a special culture all its own. It did not just belong to New York’s East Village hippie community, but surpassed boundaries of the neighborhood, the city, and the U.S. entirely.

Leamer describes a similar identity embraced by the San Francisco *Oracle*, suggesting that this shift in identity occurred not by choice, but out of necessity. According to Leamer, the *Oracle* did not break away from political journalism because it wanted to be something bigger and more powerful, but because the inclusion of stunning artwork and tidbits of groovy culture left no room for the tougher subjects of news and politics. Leamer writes:

The *Oracle* had been almost too beautiful... Next to a magnificently intricate drawing and scroll alluding to the wonder of drugs, they could not really place a grim story about a murdered drug dealer. Beside a wandering allegory on love,

how could they write about new arrivals who were having their money and belongings ripped off. (Leamer 51)

The character of the underground press in the late 1960's, with its bold graphics, taboo subject matter, and visions beyond the margins of a page, certainly appeared as a thing of beauty. As Leamer suggests, however, that beauty – the main tenet of the underground press's identity at the time – grew to such an extent that in some cases it strangled the political content that originally comprised the papers out of the press completely. *The Oracle* could not be at once a political newspaper and a visually and culturally attractive piece of magic, groovy, titillating artwork. When faced with that reality, the *Oracle* chose to take the more fashionable route and ditched the depressing politics and no-good news for a flashy, feel-good alternative.

Time would soon tell, however, that the underground press's sexy makeover would not sustain the papers. By the end of 1967, the *Oracle* had become "paraphernalia of the hippie business," more of a souvenir for tourists wanting a memento of San Francisco's hippie culture than journalism of any kind. The paper's circulation dropped by half within that year from a high of 100,000 down to 50,000, and then folded completely (Leamer 51).

Just as the trend of papers morphing into expressive movements spanned the nation, papers that took this expressive direction often failed. In reaction, a wide-sweeping shift from cultural to political emphasis in underground papers occurred between 1967 and 1969. According to a director at Boston's *Avatar*, the change was merely a representation of an inherent human characteristic; he described the evolution as "part of man's natural cycle from inward, withdrawn spiritual consideration to outward, involved political interests" (Glessing 61). Even with a shift back toward political journalism, the underground press generally remained intrinsically linked to the underground youth movement. Whether the change was a natural

adaptation or not, the re-adoption of a politically-charged emphasis was a result of the wants and beliefs of the youth creating and reading these papers. The papers became more political because of the “outward politicalization of the American youth movement” (Glessing 61).

The United Press Syndicate took note of this shift in subject matter and responded accordingly by declaring certain political stands that underground papers should express within their pages. Of utmost importance to the Syndicate were women’s and minority rights, and therefore the Underground Press Syndicate addressed these issues as they existed both in written content and in paper management. At the 1969 Underground Press Syndicate conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the following resolutions relating to women’s issues were established:

1. That male supremacy and chauvinism be eliminated from the contents of the underground papers. For example, papers should stop accepting commercial advertising that uses women’s bodies to sell records and other products, and advertisements for sex, since the use of sex as commodity specially oppresses women in this country. Also, women’s bodies should not be exploited in the papers for the purpose of increasing circulation.
2. That papers make a particular effort to publish material on women’s oppression and liberation with the entire contents of the paper.
3. That women have a full role in all the functions of the staffs of underground papers. (Glessing 65)

Not only did the Underground Press Syndicate care about protecting women’s rights for moral and political reasons, but also to keep the underground press from succumbing to tabloid-like status. By the time the *Oracle* ended its run in 1967, it teemed with sex ads and pictures of intertwined bodies; the *East Village Other*, *Berkeley Barb*, and *Los Angeles Free Press* all relied

economically on sex ads. The classified-ad manager for the *Los Angeles Free Press*, Jack Harris, wagered a guess that a third of the paper's readers purchased the rag for the sex ads alone (Leamer 54). The papers faced a dilemma: continue running exploitative ads and reaping the economic benefits from the exploitation, or censor the ads in order to support the women's movement. The Underground Press Syndicate largely made this decision for them.

The Great Speckled Bird came about after the *Oracle* failed and amid the shift from cultural to political content across the underground press. Although the declarations related to women's issues at the Underground Press Syndicate conference in 1969 came out after *The Bird* was already established, *The Great Speckled Bird* did not print sex ads like many of its underground press cohorts. A few personal classifieds made it onto the pages of *The Bird*, but they were relatively innocent and did not contain exploitative words or images. One issue of *The Great Speckled Bird* even features a classifieds section titled, "Real Classy, Fine Ads!" ("Real Classy" 8).

The differences found in *The Bird* existed because of Atlanta's unique identity as a big Southern city. The differences seen in *The Great Speckled Bird* may begin with its lack of sex ads, but its entire state of being stood out from other underground papers. The South was late catching onto the hippie movement due to the continued presence of civil rights issues and the constraints of "Southern" tradition. *The Great Speckled Bird* began at a time when most other underground papers had undergone at least two phases of identity, and had grappled with a cultural versus political character. In *The Paper Revolutionaries*, Laurence Leamer describes *The Bird's* unique ability to embrace the conflict between the cultural and the political and to reflect a unity of the two:

The Bird had broad intellectual concerns as well – long reviews of books that

wandered in and out of ideas in a manner familiar to readers of *The New York Review of Books*; first-rate film criticism; interviews with musicians and artists; coverage of art shows and local theater. In its politics the paper sought to create a uniquely Southern radicalism based as much as anything else on dormant populist tradition and directed primarily at a student audience. (Leamer 96)

Other underground papers sought to be a part of a broad counterculture movement, as expressed by *East Village Other* managing editor Allen Katzman's comment that, "We're no community paper. We're a worldwide movemet" (Leamer 51). *The Great Speckled Bird* covered topics affecting the nation and the world, but it existed as an Atlanta creation and expression above all else. Perhaps it had to; the Atlanta movement was extremely small compared to those in other cities, and, as Leamer says, "*The Bird* could define, almost become, the Movement" (Leamer 93). *The Great Speckled Bird* reflected Atlanta's character so strongly because it served as the cornerstone of counterculture in the South.

The Bird informed its readers of its Southern radicalism from its very first page. The front page story of the first issue of *The Great Speckled Bird*, "What's It All About, Ralphie?", addressed Ralph McGill, editor and publisher of the Atlanta *Constitution* and the longtime darling of Atlanta progressives. McGill, an early supporter of the Civil Rights movement, was considered *the* liberal power figure in Atlanta in his time. "What's It All About, Ralphie?" took the form of an obituary before McGill's literal death because McGill encouraged the use of the nuclear bomb during the Vietnam War, and, as *The Bird* states, "the Great Liberal passes from us" (*The Great Speckled Bird* 1).

The writers of *The Great Speckled Bird* refused to let McGill get away with supporting the bomb and the horrible deaths it would create while still maintaining his status as a

progressive, liberal Atlantan. *The Bird* adopted a more radical identity than McGill's *Constitution*, considered Atlanta's liberal newspaper; *The Bird* spared no one at the cost of politics and expectations.

The Great Speckled Bird's uniqueness also resulted from the makeup of its staff. The people who started *The Bird* include Emory students Tom and Stephanie Coffin, National Student Association workers Gene Guerrero, Jr. and Howard Romaine, Harvard graduate Jim Gwin, and other academic-minded types (Leamer 93). *The Bird* was born from the ideas of middle-class students, members of the youth movement without too much of the hippie ideology that drove the radicalism of other underground papers. Leamer estimates that "the paper probably had the highest proportion of master's-degree holders, grad-school dropouts, and Ph.D. candidates of any underground in the country" (Leamer 96). The members of *The Bird* staff understood and embraced their special status as members of more elite academic and social groups. Initially, the paper sought to "build a movement based on the personal exploitation [sic] of middle-class students (and professors) and from that base attempt to relate to the needs of the black movement, the Chicano movement and the labor movement" in the words of Guerrero (Leamer 96). While *The Bird* struggled with its middle-class, intellectual identity throughout its run, the political idea that spawned the paper remained intact.

The Bird staff ran the paper in a unique manner. Many underground papers faced clashes between staff members based on allocation of pay and quality of work assigned to them. The first-generation editors of the *Los Angeles Free Press*, *East Village Other*, and *Berkeley Barb* tended to appear as capitalist male chauvinists; they handled the exciting, creative parts of the papers and "left the 'shit work' – the typing, advertising, bookwork, et cetera – largely to the women" (Leamer 54). The editors acted like mainstream media bigwigs, while the staffers below

suffered the unglamorous lifestyles of underground journalists. As Leamer puts it, *Los Angeles Free Press* editor Arthur Kunkin “lives in a large house overlooking the city and for business purposes has found it necessary to install a telephone in his convertible” (Leamer 54). The editor grew out of the hippie movement from which his paper began.

The Great Speckled Bird ran as an extremely democratic organization. A popular vote at the weekly staff meetings determined the content of the paper (Huff). What’s more, the roles of the staff members rotated. Leamer gives a detailed description of *The Bird*’s staff rotation system, which applied to both editorial and “shit work” positions:

The system gives each staff member a specific area of editorial responsibility and control – ecology, racism, military, Women’s Lib, hip community, culture, imperialism, Movement, militarism, political economy, sexism, reactionary right, housing, communications media. This leaves each managing editor *pro tem* with the thankless task of coordinating copy, acting as a time clock and occasionally a pest. (Leamer 98)

This fascinating and novel structure for organizing roles and responsibilities of the staff of any paper, underground or mainstream, speaks volumes about the character of *The Bird*. The democratic and egalitarian manner of selecting articles and assigning jobs substantiates *The Bird*’s commitment to radical politics and solidarity with minority rights, women’s rights, and worker’s rights groups. Not only did *The Great Speckled Bird* publish content in keeping with such political ideas, but the paper’s approach to business and company structure reflected them as well. In a 2012 personal interview, founding staff member Stephanie Coffin stated of *The Bird*’s cooperative nature, “If you worked, you had a voice. If you came to meetings, you had a

voice” (S. Coffin). The staff of *The Great Speckled Bird* lived and worked according to *The Bird*’s doctrine.

Additionally, the descriptions of the various areas of “editorial responsibility and control” as outlined by Leamer demonstrate the inclusive and extensive nature of *The Bird*’s content. “Ecology, racism, military, Women’s Lib, hip community, culture, imperialism, Movement, militarism, political economy, sexism, reactionary right, housing, communications media” are editorial areas that go far beyond the simple categories of “culture” and “politics” that dominated most underground papers. Despite its tiny group of youth radicals organizing in a reluctant city in the old time-y South, *The Great Speckled Bird* covered it all.

Scholarly studies of the underground press as a whole explore the concept of the movement – or Movement with a capital “M,” as Leamer writes it – as well as the wavering between the political and cultural sides of youth counterculture as the subsistence of underground papers. Harmon embraces the cultural side; Kornbluth criticizes the mainstreaming of the hippie culture; Spates offers a sociological perspective on why the underground papers evolved; Roszak’s *The Making of a Counter Culture* provides an understanding of the political youth movement as a whole at the time during which the movement and the underground press emerged; Glessing and Leamer give interesting overviews of the underground press as a broad entity as well as explore individual papers. *The Great Speckled Bird* has a place within all of these analyses, for it certainly struggled with many of the same identity, economic, and formatting decisions as its underground brothers and sisters in other cities; interacted with both cultural and political ideas; and forever lives as a part of the Movement. *The Bird*, just like the other papers explored, belonged to the Vietnam War-era underground press.

An examination of *The Bird* alongside its fellow members of the Underground Press Syndicate must acknowledge how and why such great differences exist between *The Bird* and other papers. Leamer understands this; he devotes a dozen pages in *The Paper Revolutionaries* to *The Great Speckled Bird*, and writes, “*The Bird* is something special” (Leamer 93). Glessing praises *The Bird* for its strength “in the face of persistent southern prejudice” as well as its “features in dazzling color” (Glessing 38, 46). *The Great Speckled Bird*’s uniqueness came from its founders’ identities as middle-class academics who stuck to their radical and egalitarian political ideals unfalteringly, both in the paper’s content and staff organization, the way in which it broke beyond conventional “cultural” and “political” subject matter and expanded in and around both, its never capitulating to the easy economic solution of featuring sex ads, and the dedication to uncompromisingly political and unapologetically intellectual content while managing to look like a work of art. Most importantly, though, *The Bird* stands apart because of its relationship with Atlanta. It challenged not only the views of the conservative southerners in the city, but also of the traditional liberals; despite making enemies along the way, *The Bird* held the title of the largest paid weekly newspaper in the state of Georgia at the height of its run (Leamer 92). *The Great Speckled Bird* embodied the culture of protest and progress, art and music, rights and injustices in Atlanta and the South. This culture did not have a place in Atlanta before *The Bird* gave it a voice.

CHAPTER TWO

The influence of Atlanta and the South permeates the pages of *The Great Speckled Bird*, including editorial pieces, more creative written forms, and visual journalism. While the *Bird* staffers address injustices and causes, marches and the movement, and music and art, they weave in elements of Southern identity and the nature of Atlanta. Founding staffer Stephanie Coffin explains, “We took political and cultural aspects of the time and discussed them for our audience, which was Atlanta and the South” (S. Coffin). The newspaper cannot be read and appreciated without the acknowledgment of its geographical and cultural Southern context.

The very name of the newspaper alerts the reader of its Southern connotations. In a phone interview in March 2012, Gene Guerrero, Jr., an Emory graduate and one of *The Bird*'s original staff members, described the *Great Speckled Bird*'s naming process. He stated that after almost a year of brainstorming and working toward creating a newspaper, Tom and Stephanie Coffin, two of the newspaper's founding members, overheard a local African American musician named Rev. Pearly Brown singing the Roy Acuff country standard “The Great Speckled Bird” outside of the Twelfth Gate coffee house. The song comes from a biblical verse in Jeremiah that describes God's people as a speckled bird, as a group characterized as different yet blessed in their otherness; this Bible verse once graced the cover of *The Bird*. For the product that Guerrero, the Coffins, Howard Romaine, and their cohorts wanted to create, Guerrero describes the passage from Jeremiah as an “apt verse” (Guerrero). *The Great Speckled Bird* stood out from any other publication in the region.

The song version of “The Great Speckled Bird” has a country gospel twang, and held popularity in both religious and secular Southern music contexts. A title borrowed from a song popularized by Roy Acuff seemed particularly appropriate for a newspaper with Southern roots. Furthermore, the Coffin’s inspiration for the title *The Great Speckled Bird* came when a popular figure of the Fourteenth Street hippie area, Rev. Pearly Brown, sang the lyrics outside of one of the Atlanta movement’s most popular hangouts, the Twelfth Gate. The significance that music played in the Atlanta movement made a song title a fitting name for their newspaper, and the meaning of the song meshed with their vision as well. With a title that conveyed both traditional Southern-ness and a break from established Southern tradition at once, and embraced the street life in Atlanta and the music that gave the city’s youth movement life, *The Great Speckled Bird* gained an identity that characterized it throughout its run.

In a 2012 personal interview, Stephanie Coffin discussed *The Bird*’s Southern audience. “At the time, the South was pretty backward,” Coffin recalled. Coffin remembers Atlanta as the hippie center of the South, and the way in which progressive thinkers from all over the region congregated in Atlanta. According to Coffin, a lot of local talent existed in Atlanta, but there was no outlet for this talent until *The Bird*. When *The Bird* came into being in Atlanta in 1968, “the doors opened” (S. Coffin). Writers and artists finally had an outlet in which to express their creations.

The paper acknowledged its home in the South from the onset. The first issue of *The Great Speckled Bird* features an article about resistance to the Vietnam War draft from a Southern perspective. In a newspaper published in the spring of 1968, the subject matter of draft resistance comes as no surprise; it can be assumed that any newspaper, underground or not,

would have covered the draft and those who resisted it at that particular time. *The Bird* explores the issue of draft resistance in a manner distinctly Atlantan.

First of all, rather than reporting in a straightforward news or editorial style, the article, titled “Resistance to the Draft: Southern Cross Section,” is constructed as a profile of three men who resisted the draft, from different backgrounds, all living in Atlanta (“Resistance” 2). This form of journalism suggests *The Bird*’s interest in the people involved in draft resistance, as well as in their reasons for opposing the draft. *The Bird* shares the draft resisters’ identities, and therefore they do not appear as a homogenous group of defectors, but as individuals with their own personal reasons and beliefs behind resisting the draft. This means of constructing an article reflects Southern hospitality, expressing the paper’s interest in the three men’s backgrounds and beliefs. By presenting the resisters as individuals in a human interest-style profile, *The Bird* makes their cause and actions easier to comprehend, and also gives their stands greater significance due to a thorough explanation as to why the men personally take the viewpoints that they do.

Gene Guerrero, Jr., born and raised in the South, discusses his opposition to compulsory conscription and his questions regarding the effectiveness and integrity of a military based on a draft. *The Bird* follows up Guerrero’s own words by stating, “Gene, like most Southerners, never raised these questions until he got involved in civil rights work” (“Resistance” 2). *The Great Speckled Bird* suggests that the Civil Rights movement and its impact on the Southern idea of fairness and principles provide the cornerstone of Guerrero’s beliefs about the draft and the war in general, as well as the similar beliefs of other progressive Southerners. The overwhelming presence of the best and worst moments of the Civil Rights movement made an imprint on Atlanta and the South that was still completely palpable in the region in 1968 when this article

went to print; the ideas of human and civil rights, as well as the government's roles in monitoring and determining these rights, would certainly bring to mind the Civil Rights movement for Southerners at the time, even when applied to the rights of young men of all races to deny the draft.

The article describes the way in which Guerrero's opinions formed as a result of his Civil Rights activism, and that before his involvement in the movement he "never raised these questions" ("Resistance" 2). In a 2012 interview, Guerrero explained how his pre-Civil Rights work history made resisting the draft difficult. "The draft was a big issue for any of us born at the wrong age" Guerrero states. His draft board did not believe his anti-war beliefs, however, because Guerrero participated in the ROTC at Northside High School and for two years at Emory University. When Guerrero became involved with the Southern Student Organizing Committee, or SSOC, a Civil Rights-based organization like the mostly black Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) for white students, he realized that his progressive beliefs in Civil Rights stood in the way of his participation in the Vietnam War.

As a result of his activism in the Civil Rights movement, the article explains that Guerrero sees the draft as unfair and outdated governmental control. He would prefer a completely volunteer army "with defense as its main purpose" ("Resistance" 2). The Civil Rights movement sought to give black and white Americans equal rights; the institution of a draft, in Guerrero's mind, snatches away the rights of young men of every race in America. Through the Civil Rights-influenced lens of rights and equality, Guerrero believes that the military should focus on defending the country – not conquering others – with the help of only the soldiers who want to be a part of the fight.

Guerrero says, “The draft is a sign of the society’s sickness. It is sick when a Negro looks to being drafted and serving in the army as a way out of the ghetto” (“Resistance” 2). Guerrero’s stance draws largely from the unjust racial consequences of the draft, as the violence and lack of opportunity that dominate many majority African American neighborhoods make the draft seem like a chance for upward mobility. Guerrero’s history in the South and his consciousness of the terrible race disparities that took place in the South before, during, and after the Civil Rights movement draw attention to the issues of race and opportunity that the draft presents. His work as a Civil Rights activist led Guerrero to view the draft not as simply an unfair, forced mandate, but also as a symbol of racial inequality and the poor conditions faced by young African American men in the South and beyond.

Guerrero asserts that he and his African American compatriots deserve the same opportunity for safety both here and in the war. He finds most Americans’ tendency to “deplore ghetto ‘violence’ without ever looking at its cause, while going along with the violence in Vietnam” shocking (“Resistance” 2). According to Guerrero, most Americans, and certainly most Southerners, view both the ghetto and Vietnam as places of otherness. Neither Vietnam nor Atlanta’s ghettos should be accepted as an environment of violence, and only an informed and progressive public can see beyond the distanced view of the majority.

The manner in which the author states that Guerrero’s beliefs are “like most Southerners” suggests the broad reach of the Civil Rights influence (“Resistance” 2). The author assumes that his readers and Southerners in general recognize Guerrero’s beliefs as in keeping with their own, or at least that they understand the root of and the reason behind his stance. The implication of a unique Southern attitude toward the draft, as suggested by the author’s statement that Guerrero’s beliefs are “like most Southerners” rather than like most Americans, or most people, shows that

resisters in other parts of the country would be less likely to associate Civil Rights and racial inequality with the issue of the draft.

Another resister featured in this article is Arthur Burghardt, a black man from Baltimore who moved to Atlanta a little over a decade before the article's publication date. As someone who grew up facing inequality and restrictions based on race, Burghardt refuses to sit back and accept others telling him what he may and may not do. He spent his younger years feeling like a second-class citizen to his white counterparts, and if the Civil Rights movement determined that he is an equally able person, then why should the government treat him like their puppet?

Burghardt states:

I just got fed up with the way power has pushed me around. White made right in prep school and college. The power of the black bourgeoisie. The power of this democratic-fascistic nation. I'm just going to take this dish and feed it right back to them. ("Resistance" 2)

The draft, as Burghardt sees it, serves as an instrument of power put in place by the U.S. government. Burghardt struggled for his own rights for most of his life, and refuses to let the government force him into fighting a war he does not believe in. Burghardt has rights as a citizen, and believes that one of those rights should be the right to refuse military service; as such, he stands up to the military's assumption that he will automatically serve the country as they order him.

As the article's headline "Resistance to the Draft: Southern Cross Section" suggests, Guerrero, Burghardt, and Stephen Abbott, the third man profiled in the article who is a former Yankee with strong Christian convictions, come from different backgrounds but all currently live in Atlanta and oppose the draft. The dominance of the Civil Rights movement in the city's

consciousness greatly influences both Guerrero and Burghardt's views on the draft, and though Abbott's views come from his religious background, he found a home in Atlanta and therefore its character and history affect his belief system. Atlanta functions as more than just the coincidental residence of three draft resisters that *The Bird* chose to feature; their Southern home and state of being play a role in their beliefs regarding the draft, as well as in their views on human rights in general.

An August 1969 edition of *The Great Speckled Bird* opens up to a page dedicated to local happenings with a curious layout: blocks of text dispersed throughout the page, each with a single word headline. The words "OUR PEOPLE | OUR TOWN" sit royally at the top of the page, indicating that the photos and articles that exist in the spread depict the lives and actions of members of the Atlanta movement community ("Our People Our Town" 2-3). Gene Guerrero discussed the layout style employed in this two-page spread, one incorporating large swaths of white space around text and photographs, in a 2012 interview. He credits artistic-minded *Bird* staff members Stephanie Coffin and Linda Howard for this daring, spacious layout that he and other staffers at first considered a waste of space. Looking back, Guerrero states that the abundance of white space, along with other artistic layout decisions, made *The Great Speckled Bird* "more accessible, readable, and attractive" (Guerrero).

Stephanie Coffin explained the white space-heavy layout further in a 2012 personal interview. Coffin stated that the layout, with lots of white space, unjustified text, and bright colors, served to encourage people to read the paper. *The Bird* staffers recognized that many people did not read the newspapers that already existed in Atlanta, so, in Coffin's words, their paper symbolized a "rebellion against the standards." Shorter articles, colors on the front, back,

and center spread of the paper, and what Coffin describes as “a healthy respect for the image” made *The Bird* a visually enticing rebellion of traditional newspaper layouts (S. Coffin).

One article in this airy layout, “mace,” discusses the frequent use of mace by local police officers and its potential for creating – as the Surgeon General described – “more than transient effects” (red, 2). The author, stylized in all lowercase letters as jimmy the red – a moniker that perhaps serves as a reference to conservative thinkers’ once popular term for “communist” – relates the police presence on Fourteenth Street on August 4, 1969 to the national discussion on the health effects and police misuse of mace.

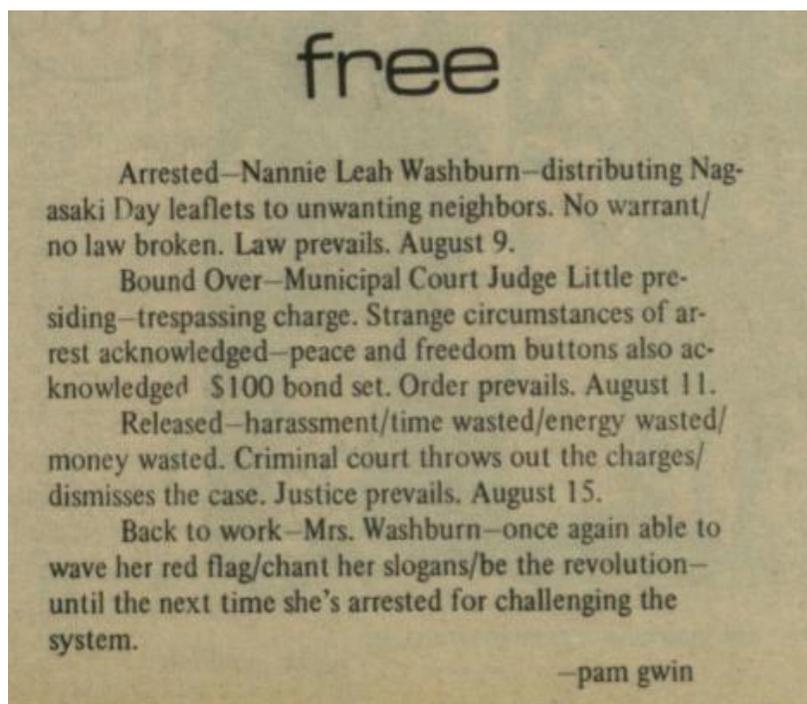
The police and their mace came out in response to about twenty demonstrators protesting the already stifling police presence in the Fourteenth Street Community, the major hippie and counterculture neighborhood in Atlanta. Rather than using the mace as self-defense, however, the article reports that the police officers sprayed mace within two feet of the faces of passive demonstrators, including people already sitting inside of police vehicles as well as a Georgia Tech student who happened to be walking by. Jimmy the red cites reports from the Food and Drug Administration and from doctors in Atlanta and San Francisco that declare the possible lasting harmful physical effects of mace, and the necessity of police to only use mace in properly ventilated spaces and with plenty of distance from the spray recipient. Despite these medically-grounded reports, jimmy the red asserts that police personnel in Atlanta and elsewhere never learned the “proper” way to use mace (red 2-3).

The author addresses the use of mace on Fourteenth Street protestors as well as on residents of Atlanta’s poorest African American communities. Jimmy the red describes Atlanta politicians’ declaration that police would only be permitted to use mace “for Extraordinary Social Control – i.e. Summerhill, Dixie Hills, Boulevard, or maybe even Fourteenth Street” (red

2). The first three neighborhoods listed are historically African American areas that suffered from civilian vs. police battles during the Civil Rights era. Dixie Hills hosted one of the most famous race-fueled scuffles in Atlanta history in the summer of 1967, a violent contest between the neighborhood's black youth and the on-duty policemen put in place after an instance of elevated tension between a white security guard and a black teenage boy. In *Burial for a King: Martin Luther King Jr. 's Funeral and the Week That Transformed Atlanta and Rocked the Nation*, Rebecca Burns discusses the build-up to the Dixie Hills riots and the role that Black Panther Stokely Carmichael played in inciting the violence. When the youth followed Carmichael's lead and rebelled against the increased police presence in their neighborhood, the police turned not only to mace but also to gunfire for this example of "Extraordinary Social Control" (Burns 56; red 2).

By citing the incident at Dixie Hills, which occurred two years before the article's publication but remained fresh in the minds of most Atlantans, jimmy the red questions how police can determine what qualifies as "Extraordinary Social Control," and asks the reader to wonder if police use of mace could elevate to gunshots in the Fourteenth Street neighborhood (red 2). The loose guidelines and the hope that police will use their own discretion with regard to mace and other instruments of crowd control should incite fear in the reader, for young protesters in a nearby neighborhood met their death when resisting police presence a mere two years earlier. jimmy the red's reference to Dixie Hills also builds solidarity between the two groups despite the insinuation of a difference in race; both Dixie Hills and Fourteenth Street protestors identify themselves as young people working toward a cause, and the police who mace and shoot such protestors see troublemakers before noticing the color of their skin.

Below the “mace” article is a small square piece written by pam gwin with the title “free” (gwin 2). Figure 1 displays the article as it appears in the issue, a short, simple feature that tells a story and conveys the author’s aggravation with the police reaction to Nannie Leah Washburn’s protests. The nontraditional structure of the article expresses both the newsworthy account of



Washburn’s arrest and gwin’s

Figure 1

opinion on the matter without the use of complete sentences, and with an unjustified text format. The article contains four divisions of actions assigned to Ms. Washburn: “Arrested, Bound Over, Released, Back to Work.” Each of these four designations precedes a description of Washburn’s activities during that phase. The first section, “Arrested,” describes Washburn’s arrest-inducing leaflet distribution, then states that her arrest came with “no warrant/no law broken.” The police arrested Washburn without cause, but held her anyway; as gwin says, “law prevails” (gwin 2).

The next phase, “Bound Over,” describes the Municipal Court Judge Little’s decision to charge Washburn with trespassing despite the acknowledgment of her questionable arrest. Gwin’s statement that “order prevails” in this period demonstrates the unjustness of the system when order wins over law and fairness (gwin 2). Like the “mace” article above it, “free” examines the tendency of Atlanta law enforcement to act on their own judgment and not

according to the requirements of the law when dealing with protestors, and warns the reader of the inconsistencies of the system.

Next, Washburn gets “released” when the court dismisses the charges against her. Even though the court finally acknowledges Washburn’s innocence and “justice prevails,” her time forced into custody serves an example of the assertion of police power over protestors in the form of unnecessary arrest that only results in “harassment/time wasted/energy wasted/money wasted” (gwin 2). Washburn never broke the law and met release without charges against her, but the forced police action occurred to prove a point: that police hold more power than the protestors’ freedom. Gwin’s article acknowledges the common nature of incidents like Washburn’s when she says that Washburn can go about her life and her activism “until the next time she’s arrested for challenging the system” (gwin 2). Gwin expects readers to sympathize with Washburn’s unjust arrest, and to understand the frequent yet absurd occurrence of such arrests. Gwin’s article tells the story of five days in Washburn’s life, but also warns readers of an experience that they may likely share with this innocent pamphlet distributor if they continue in their movement activities.

Gwin’s article, in addition to creatively informing readers of a specific woman’s run-in with law enforcement, alerts readers that they, too, could face trouble with the police for embracing their beliefs in their own Fourteenth Street community. The article resembles a creatively written and organized public service announcement, as it functions as both a news story and a warning to fellow members of the movement. *The Bird*’s role as the newspaper of Atlanta’s youth movement made it the ideal source of information about events and happenings within the community. The last page of every issue *The Bird* took the form of a calendar of events, notifying readers of concerts, protests, films, theater performances, and art exhibits, and

the back page usually included some elements in color (S. Coffin). The back page of *The Great Speckled Bird* from January 31, 1969 features, on Friday the 31st, notice of a concert given by the Byrds at Emory's Glenn Memorial Auditorium. The show by the popular band costs \$2.00 for "Emory people," and signifies the intricate link between protest music, the youth movement, and educational institutions ("Coming Events" 16). The stated difference in price for Emory people and "Others" suggests that enough Emory students read *The Bird* that they would turn to the paper for information about an event at their school ("Coming Events" 16).

Concerts feature prominently on this back page, but events related to movement and protest organization dominate the layout. One meeting in particular, the Southern Mobilization Planning Conference, stands out on the page (see Figure 2). The notice of the meeting advertises the aims of national movement-related groups, including planning of "anti-war, pro-people action" ("Southern Mobilization Planning Conference" 16). Despite the advertisement's acknowledgement of issues of a national scope, the event notice in *The Bird* clarifies that the conference will address movement organization in the South, not across the country. The



Figure 2

conference plans to host "GIs from Forts McPherson, Benning, Jackson, McClellan, Gordon, and more," inviting members of the community to interact with and learn from military personnel stationed at forts within the state of Georgia ("Conference" 16). In welcoming military members from local forts, the

conference makes the movement and the effects of the Vietnam War regionally and personally relevant. The advertisement recognizes that the war impacts the entire country, but its effects on Atlanta and the South and the residents of *The Bird*'s community hold uniqueness.

Furthermore, the ad, presented in bright red font with a classic and unassuming border, opens with the line "The movement is getting itself together in Atlanta" ("Conference" 16). This statement suggests that in early 1969, the Atlanta movement lacked the strength that the movement possessed in other cities. The advertisement stresses the importance for Atlantans to organize in order to solidify the movement in the city, but acknowledges that the South's movement efforts must catch up with those of the rest of the country. The ad's prominent placement in *The Bird*'s event calendar suggests that both the conference organizers and the newspaper understood that readers of *The Great Speckled Bird* served as the conference's target Southern audience.

While the articles "free" and "mace" demonstrate *The Bird*'s unconventional page layouts and writing styles, the newspaper's frequent vignettes dubbed "foibles" exemplify *The Bird*'s originality and quirky character in creative writing (for an example of artwork associated with *Great Speckled Bird* foibles, see Figure 3). These "foibles to ade people," which play on the concepts of "foible" and "fable," appear regularly in the pages of *The Bird* as commentaries on social and political issues written in a creative, nontraditional style. The author of the foibles is credited, in all lowercase letters, as og, king of bashan. Og served as the pseudonym for Irving "Bud" Foote, a longtime English professor at Georgia Tech. Foote also gained recognition as a poet and folk musician, a reviewer for publications including *The Atlanta Constitution*, and a science fiction enthusiast ("Irving"). Despite Foote's achievements and status as an academic,

og's foibles adopted the dialect of an uneducated speaker, with random capitalizations and many misspellings.

An element of the DeKalb History Center's 2011-2012 *Great Speckled Bird* exhibit features a quote from Foote about the origin of og, king of bashan. The text reads:

Og began just as a name, writing stuff which was obviously a pastiche of George Ade's *Foibles in Slang*; as time went on, Og began to take on his own character and appeared in the *Foibles to Ade (sic.) People*. (Almost nobody got the pun, or cared much when it was explained.) The foibles featuring Signifyin' Sam were conscious descendants of Langston Hughes' Simple stories. One may also detect traces of e.e. cummings and Donald Ogden Stewart; but ultimately, I think, Og developed his own maverick rhetoric, which I still like. (Foote)

As Foote states, og began as a hybrid of different literary sources, but developed his own voice as his presence in *The Bird* grew.

The December 22, 1969 issue of *The Great Speckled Bird* features a holiday foible, credited to "og, merry christmas of bashan" (merry christmas of bashan 10). The foible, "Maybe, Virginia, and Then Again, Maybe Not" adapts its title

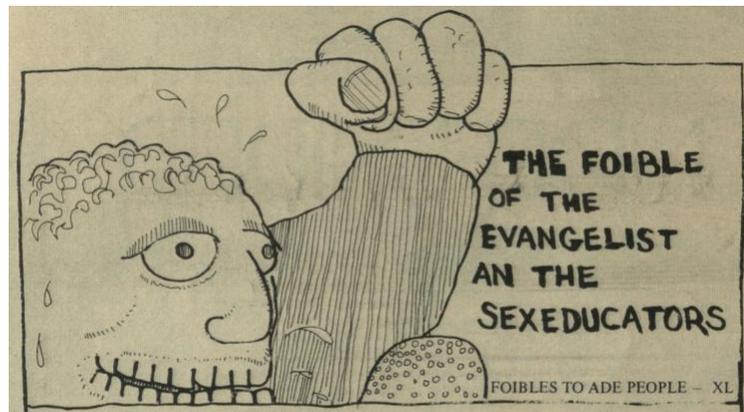


Figure 3

from history's most reprinted editorial, "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus," an unsigned response to a girl's letter featured in the September 21, 1897 printing of New York's *The Sun* that reassures the girl and all readers of unseen magic in the world ("Yes, Virginia"). "Maybe,

Virginia, and Then Again Maybe Not” follows og as he uncovers a letter written to “Sandy Claws” asking for a few Christmas favors (merry christmas of bashan 10).

The foible begins with og describing a walk. He writes, “Last night it was a Cold an Frosty evenin an I was On my Way to Manuels.” Og makes a connection with his Left-leaning Atlanta readers in the first sentence, for he is headed to Manuel’s Tavern, the longtime and legendary bar that serves as a haven and hangout for Atlanta Democrats and other liberal-minded folks. The letter that og uncovers on his trip to Manuel’s begins with an explanation of the purpose of the letter:

Dere Sandy Claws lissen I have got About everything I can Use this Time Around
(i can Wait Until nex year for the 1929 Dusenber an the J-200 Sandy) an i
thought I Would Write in favor of My Friens who maybe Haven't got the six
centeses or the Paper or the Energy: (merry christmas of bashan 10)

The letter takes on a selfless task, asking Santa for things on behalf of those who cannot afford paper or postage or the time required to make a Christmas list. The writer of the letter already has “About everything [he] can Use this Time Around,” a statement that characterizes him as either incredibly giving or inconceivably wealthy. Regardless, the writer sets aside his own whims to ask for a fancy automobile and instead lists off what he hopes Santa will bring to his friends (merry christmas of bashan 10).

The writer asks for affordable school lunches, protection of Alaskan wilderness against oil drilling, and the well being of members of the Black Panther Party. He asks, “I have these Frens with brothers an sons an husbins an boyfrens in the Army an Navy an Jail an Canada: could you Please give them All Back to Each Another?” (merry christmas of bashan 10). In an ignorant-sounding and kindhearted manner, the writer asks for Santa to end the War in Vietnam.

The writer of the letter resists a blatant political message in favor of a plea for reuniting families; the loved ones must remain apart until the war ends, and Santa's bringing them back together would signify an end to the war. The message gains power from its unassuming tone, for it reminds the reader that families and friends hold more importance than political parties or agendas in the time of war, and that the human lives and connections threatened should weigh heavily enough for the U.S. – or Santa Claus – to call for a ceasefire.

The attitude that family always comes first in this portion of the foible draws from a Southern way of thinking. In *Politics in Music*, Courtney Brown describes the importance of family in political, patriotic country music. One example that Brown uses exists at the opposite end of the political spectrum from the beliefs of *The Great Speckled Bird*: Toby Keith's 2002 song "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)." Brown draws attention to Keith's emphasis on family values, especially in the portion of the song that describes a veteran father's faithfulness to his country despite war injuries because "He wanted my mother, my brother, my sister and me / To grow up and live happy / In the land of the free" (Brown 101). Keith's song encourages listeners to support the war on terror by equating defense of country with defense of family, while the og, merry christmas of bashan uses familial love as a reason to end the Vietnam War. Despite their different intentions, both the foible and the country tune appeal to the Southern principle of family loyalty.

Southern music appears within the Christmas foible as well. The writer asks a favor on behalf of local blues and folk musicians:

Bring Very Great Years with Concerts an Recordin Dates for Buddy Moss an
Brownie McGhee an Jeff Espina an Pearly Brown an Chuck Perdue an Tam
Duffil an all the Other People who have been Givin us yearroun Christmasses for

lo, these Many Years. (merry christmas of bashan 10)

The musicians named, black and white, held some recognition in Atlanta and the South but, at the time of the foible's publication, knew little widespread notoriety. The letter's writer asks for "Great Years with Concerts an Recordin Dates" for these musicians, hoping that Santa will bring them the recognition that their talents deserve. The writer credits their music for "Givin us yearroun Christmasses," asserting that the musicians bring joy to local listeners every day of the year. The writer recognizes the importance of music in Atlanta, placing the request for success for these musicians alongside appeals for an end to the War in Vietnam, for "Self-Determination [for] Black People," and for protection and expansion of wild animals and the natural world (merry christmas of bashan 10). Atlanta musicians and the recognition they deserve rank on par with the biggest social and political causes of the day in the eyes of the writer of this Christmas letter.

One musician in the letter's musical line-up, Pearly Brown, holds particular importance for *The Great Speckled Bird* and its readers. Blind musician and minister Pearly Brown spent time singing and preaching along the Fourteenth Street area of Atlanta during the peak of the city's youth movement. When *Bird* founding members Tom and Stephanie Coffin overheard him singing "The Great Speckled Bird" outside of the Twelfth Street coffee house, they knew their newspaper finally had a name (Guerrero). Certainly Brown deserved a special visit from Santa Claus.

Finally, the writer circles back to the opening of og's story, as though the letter's writer and og the storyteller live parallel lives. He asks Santa to "Bring Manuel a Democratic Party that's worthy of Him" (merry christmas of bashan 10). The letter's writer begs for a strong and upstanding Democratic Party, but does so with an Atlanta focus. Rather than naming particular

politicians or causes in Atlanta and the nation, the writer hopes for a Democratic Party worthy of a toast inside Manuel's Tavern, the Atlanta institution toward which og journeys.

The foible ends like a fable: with a moral. Whether the final line is part of the found letter or og's own words remains unclear, but brings the same message regardless. It reads, "(On Second thought (*Moral: dont bring None of These Things: i know we have to Do It our selfs.*))" (merry christmas of bashan 10). The foible's finale reminds the reader that the Christmas list contains wishes that the people hoping for change must act on themselves. The idea of a second thought retracts the requests for Santa, for the writer understands that if Mr. Claus granted the wishes without any effort on the part of the recipients, the problems would remain. The issues brought up in the letter, from Civil Rights to the Vietnam War to the integrity of the Democratic Party to the cleanliness of local streams, can only find resolution when the people accept that change needs to happen and that they must be the catalyst for that change. The foible ends with an emphasis on hard work to overcome tough times, a concept that comes from the Southern tradition; Southerners boast belief in the necessity to earn one's own keep arguably more so than people elsewhere in the nation. The letter's greatest wish for a Christmas miracle comes in the form of the people of Atlanta and beyond persevering to create the great world that *The Sun's* editorial for Virginia claims can exist when the people believe in themselves.

As the foible "Maybe, Virginia, and Then Again, Maybe Not" suggests in its plea for success for local blues and folk musicians, the underground culture of Atlanta in the late 1960's and early 1970's placed great importance on music. The music industry, in return, relied on the underground press for exposure and communication. In "Who'll Stop the Rain? Youth Culture, Rock 'n' Roll, and Social Crises," George Lipsitz describes the underground press as an "adjunct" to the music business, as record companies spent big ad money and counted on

positive reviews in underground papers in order to promote their artists (Lipsitz 5). *The Great Speckled Bird* covered concerts, reviewed albums, and advertised shows and other musical happenings in practically every issue.

Founding member of the *Bird* staff Gene Guerrero, Jr. recounted his interactions with the music business during a 2012 phone interview. “The music industry saw us as a way to sell records,” Guerrero said. An area representative for RCA often invited Guerrero to pick up loads of records in hopes that he would write positive reviews of RCA artists. Record companies purchased full-page ads, a great moneymaker for *The Bird* until, as Guerrero remembers, the FBI pressured record companies to stop supporting the underground press (Guerrero).

A local act known as The Hampton Grease Band probably shows up in *The Great Speckled Bird* more than any other musicians. In *Unknown Legends of Rock ‘n’ Roll*, Richie Unterberger describes the band as “as much about performance art as music.” The band, though signed to Columbia Records long enough to release one album in 1971, broke conventions in their sound and their stage persona. The band carried out stage antics from crazy stunts to everyday acts, like eating cereal, while performing onstage. Their stage presence combined with twenty-minute jams and unconventional lyric sources – such as ingredient lists and encyclopedia entries – made the Hampton Grease Band “like nothing else in the South” (Unterberger 335-336).

The Great Speckled Bird agreed with Unterberger’s assessment. Their features on the band describe them as vital to Atlanta’s underground community. In one portion of a full-page spread on the Hampton Grease Band, *Bird* writer Miller Francis, Jr. states:

The Hampton Grease Band is one of the most important staples in Atlanta's fast-growing youth community of identification. We know they're great, they are

always *there*, and sometimes they're better than at other times; but unlike other rock groups in the area, the Hampton Grease Band seems to be taking on a community function in which music-rock and roll music, loud music, electric music, violent music, the high energy force for change...serves as a spring in which a community can periodically refresh itself, a musical fountain of youth consciousness. (francis 11).

Francis's strong words credit the Hampton Grease Band with the ability to remind Atlanta's youth what their movement stands for, and to reinvigorate the underground youth movement. The band serves as a much-needed constant presence in the Atlanta underground scene, and francis regards them as a foundation on which the rest of the movement relies in order to stay on track. Francis emphasizes the Hampton Grease Band's role in the community, suggesting that they "tak[e] on a community function" to bring about change through the influence of music. The Hampton Grease Band makes music, but more importantly, they inspire Atlanta's youth community.

In addition to playing regular gigs at popular area venues such as the Twelfth Gate on Tenth Street (see Figure 4) and the Catacombs on Fourteenth Street, the Hampton Grease Band asserted themselves as champions of Atlanta's hip community. When the Hip Community Center – a hub that combined elements of the arts, like *The Bird*, practical services like a free clinic, and opportunities for spiritual wellness with various ministries – opened up in December of 1969, they were short on staff and funding. The Hampton Grease Band played a show to benefit the Community Center by drumming up support and funding from their fans (guerrero 3). As francis describes in his article on the band, the Hampton Grease Band used their position as a popular local act to influence community matters and encourage the youth of Atlanta to get involved

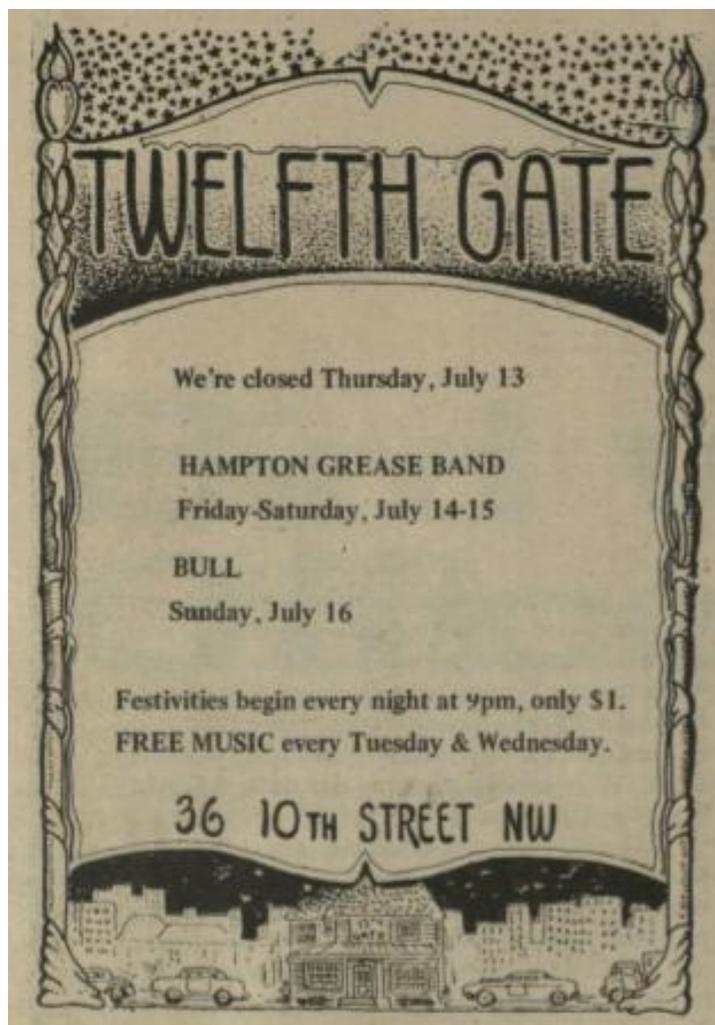


Figure 4

consciously appreciate the music around them. Francis describes the greatness of the Grease Band as the pinnacle of great art in the city of Atlanta:

There is nothing in the High Mausoleum of "Art" that can approach the relationship between artistic creation and aesthetic response that the Hampton Grease Band has given to Atlanta's youth community. One kind of art hangs up on the wall, somebody owns it. The other belongs to the people who put the system and its values up against the wall. Hail, hail rock and roll! (francis 11)

(francis 11). Their willingness to play the benefit for the Hip Community Center exemplifies their presence in the community and their role as a connection between music and activism in Atlanta.

Francis argues that the Hampton Grease Band's willing presence in community events and Atlanta counterculture activities sometimes numbed the youth's reactions to their music as art. The Hampton Grease Band was such a staple that listeners forgot to

Francis believes that the Hampton Grease Band's music stands out as superior to the art on display at the High Museum, altered in the article to read "the High Mausoleum of 'Art'" (Francis 11). Francis's identifying the High as a mausoleum rather than a museum suggests the lack of life that exists within the walls of the arts center. The High came about as a project of the old guard of Atlanta art patrons, and Francis suggests that their stuffier tastes in art clash with the artistic needs of the city's youth community. Francis writes that the art at the High stands at a distance from the viewers, for the character of the museum prevents them from feeling a connection or forging an experience with the art on the walls. The art belongs to someone else, and the masses must appreciate it through a fixed separation.

The art created by the Hampton Grease Band, on the other hand, belongs to everyone who hears it. Rather than putting artistic creation up on the wall, Francis suggests that the Hampton Grease Band's music serves to help Atlanta counterculture "put the system and its values up against the wall" (Francis 11). According to Francis, art should not be put on a pedestal, but should put activists in motion to question and challenge the traditional system. In his eyes, the Hampton Grease Band creates art not simply for the public to admire, but art that inspires youth to make strides in their movement. Francis values the Hampton Grease Band's brand of art over that found in the High so much so that he puts the art of the High in quotation marks, suggesting a quality of falseness. Francis considers the Hampton Grease Band's creations more authentically artistic than anything found in Atlanta's most famous art museum.

The Hampton Grease Band created music that drew listeners in, with long tunes often clocking in around twenty minutes that jammed along as the funky soundtrack of Atlanta's youth movement (Unterberger 335). The music, a mixture of jazz, blues, and rock influences, and often featuring Hampton's screams and other less conventional sounds, did not pride itself on

accessibility, but contains enough quirky, sprawling elements that it nevertheless engulfs the listener in its unconventional charm. The Hampton Grease Band intended their music to be engulfed by the listener as well; their only record, released on the Columbia label, is titled *Music to Eat*. As Francis's article suggests, the Hampton Grease Band created art for the youth in the movement to embrace and ingest. Their sounds fed the activist spirit in the city.

Not everyone could stomach the Hampton Grease Band's music. In an interview with *The Great Speckled Bird*, Bruce Hampton describes the fear that their music instills in some people. "What they're really afraid of is that, if they listen, they'll find out that they're really as much of what we're playing about as we are" ("grease rap" 11). The band challenged the system as well as the people of Atlanta, and acknowledged that their music played a major role in the Atlanta counterculture movement. The concept of engulfment stands out in Hampton's assertion, as the music (and the movement it embodied) expressed such dynamic and unknown sounds that people often hesitated to listen to it. Listening to the band, Hampton suggests, triggers an understanding of the movement and one's own place within it.

Bird staff writer Miller Francis, Jr. sees the Hampton Grease Band's music as more powerful than the visual art on display at the High Museum, but *The Great Speckled Bird* embraced visual arts alongside artistic writing and music within its pages. Fast forward to the 2011-2012 DeKalb History Center *Great Speckled Bird* exhibit, and photographs from Hampton Grease Band concerts and the band's album covers serve as artwork in a museum-style display. The newspaper combined visual and musical arts with its advertisements and flyers for concerts around the city, often incorporating vibrant, colorful pages to promote upcoming performances. This practice brought music, visual arts, writing, and the various creative elements of the Atlanta youth movement together in one page.

In a 2012 personal interview, Stephanie Coffin described the ad designing process. Artists came to *The Bird*'s Tuesday night layout sessions prepared to create advertisements and cover images on the spot. The DeKalb History Center's 2011-2012 *Bird* exhibit features a photograph of artist Ron Ausburn creating a cover directly onto a layout sheet. Coffin described the layout process as beginning with the text and then looking for appropriate graphics. If artists wanted their work featured in *The Bird*, they came to the layout and went to work, but did not get paid for their creations. "Having no money for contributors made it easy," laughed Coffin (S. Coffin).

The Hampton Grease Band frequently showed up in *The Bird*'s concert ads. One particular show, a two-day concert at an abandoned tire warehouse near downtown, featured the Hampton Grease Band as well as the Allman Brothers, Brick Wall, Sweet Younguns, and Booger Band. In a 2012 phone interview, Gene Guerrero, Jr. recalled that *The Bird* provided the "first publicity to the Allman Brothers," a band that went on to garner fame throughout the country for their Southern rock (Guerrero). The other bands on the bill, Brick Wall, Sweet Younguns, and Booger Band appear throughout ads and event pages in many issues of *The Great Speckled Bird*, but never shot to fame. The bands featured in this ad fit loosely within the rock 'n' roll genre, but *The Bird* cared about more than just rock. During a visit to the 2011-2012 *Great Speckled Bird* exhibit at the DeKalb History Center, Stephanie Coffin pointed out *The Bird*'s written and photographic coverage of a bluegrass festival in Lavonia, Georgia (S. Coffin). In a 2012 phone interview, Gene Guerrero, Jr. reminisced about writing a review of a Dolly Parton album, and the kind thank you letter he received from Parton for the positive review (the letter still hangs in Guerrero's office). She agreed to an interview, and *The Bird* traveled to Nashville to talk to the country star and her then partner Porter Wagoner in person. Guerrero

recalled the country musicians' friendly and warm demeanors, a pleasant change from the new age rock folks who were "awful to talk to." In response to *The Bird's* coverage of country artists, Guerrero and other writers received letters from hippies declaring that *The Bird* made them realize that they could enjoy the music their parents' listened to after all (Guerrero).

The flyer for the rock-centric event in the featured advertisement (see Figure 5) plays on the Thanksgiving season during which the event, aptly called the Turkey Trip, took place. In bright blue ink, the ad contains psychedelic looking letters and a big turkey in the center whose feathers appear strikingly similar to marijuana leaves. The leaf/feather imagery as well as the word "trip" to describe the concert indicate drug connotations, which the artist would understand to appeal to the counterculture youth audience. In *The Paper Revolutionaries*, Jesse Kornbluth describes marijuana as one of the uniting forces in the youth movement, and this advertisement embraces that idea (Kornbluth 94). The design suggests that hip, marijuana-smoking, like-minded people will find the ad attractive and will therefore attend the concert.

While the image existed as an ad in *The Great Speckled Bird*, its character aligned with the newspaper's overall character. Under the list of bands in the concert line up, the design advertises a "Special Guest?!!!" (Turkey Trip). The laid back, goofy formatting of the special guest feature makes the ad seem like a message to a friend, not a formal advertisement. A reader of *The Great Speckled Bird* would likely view the page as a message from one friend to another anyhow, for within the tight-knit movement community, the lineup of local bands would suggest familiar faces and sounds.

The ad cites the abandoned warehouse of the Duke Tire Co. as the site of the two-day concert event. The logo of the former tire company sits with ironic pride in the bottom right-hand



Figure 5

corner, as though the company sponsored the concert. Instead, the bands play in the space that the company once occupied, now simply a warehouse that sits at the corner of Mitchell and Elliott Streets, in what is known as the Castleberry Hill neighborhood in 2012.

The page devoted to the Turkey Trip is nothing more than a paid advertisement, but it appears as a work of art. The bright color and funky design of the letters and the image characterize this ad as a piece of signature psychedelic artistic style, lightning bolt font and swirly layout included. The ad appeared in a newspaper, but it would look equally at home as an artistic concert poster on a teenager's wall.

On April 3, 2012, Stephanie Coffin discussed the various elements of the DeKalb History Center's 2011-2012 *Great Speckled Bird* exhibit. As part of the team that created the exhibit, Coffin explained how they reached decisions as to which elements of the paper – from articles to covers to photographs – became part of the exhibit. In reference to a collage of covers about the Vietnam War, Coffin discussed the dilemma the paper faced of how to address the war week after week. Beyond the war, *The Bird's* covers took on topics of international events and controversies, such as South African Apartheid and the Allende government in Chile, as well as the Black Panther Party, gay liberation, women's liberation, including health issues, legal matters, and women-focused art, the labor movement, and Atlanta music and movement events. "The covers show the range of issues the Left was taking up," explained Coffin (S. Coffin).

The centrality of Atlanta in the *Bird* exhibit, from photos of student marches in downtown Atlanta to articles on mayor Sam Massell to coverage of local labor strikes, demonstrates the Atlanta spirit that the newspaper possessed. "We always tried to cover local news," Coffin stated. "Our strength was our connection to the community" (S. Coffin). *The Great Speckled Bird* reflected the character of Atlanta, but the city did not always claim *The*

Bird. Coffin rattled off problems that the paper faced within the city, including getting “busted for obscenity” by Coca-Cola in 1969 for an image that criticized the corporation, the post office’s refusal to distribute *The Bird* due to abortion ads, the Westminster Avenue location’s 1972 firebombing, and the constant arrests and harassment of *Bird* sellers. Local printers refused to produce the paper, and therefore *The Bird* traveled to Montgomery, Alabama for printing for the majority of its run (S. Coffin).

The Bird offered its fair share of criticism of the city of Atlanta as well. One particularly artistic example of Atlanta criticism can be found on the paper’s March 20, 1972 cover (see Figure 6). The cover sends a happy birthday message to the paper and the city, and reads, “Great Speckled Bird Rising – Phenix Descending” (“Happy Birthday” 1). The cover image, a comic book-like cartoon, depicts a bird stomping on a defeated phoenix, a symbol of Atlanta. The image suggests that *The Bird* and its liberal mindset hold greater significance in 1972 than the “old fashioned Southern belligerence” that dominated the city for its first 125 years (“Happy Birthday” 1). When Stephanie Coffin stopped by this cover in the DeKalb History Center exhibit, she pointed to the center speech bubble at the bottom of the image and laughed. The mini comic reads, “Atlanta has more possums in it than any other city its size in the entire world!” (“Happy Birthday” 1). “That is so Southern!” Coffin exclaimed. According to the humor of the cover, traditional Atlantans take pride in statistics such as possum abundance, while *The Bird* has something more impressive to boast. The next bubble, featuring a cartoon of mayor Sam Massell lamenting “Curses! Foiled again!!”, reads, “Although only four years old, the Great Speckled Bird has earned the respect and gratitude of countless citizens for our never ending battle against tyranny, injustice, and the American way!” (“Happy Birthday” 1).

The Bird expresses its pride in its role as the progressive voice of the Atlanta movement in this “Happy Birthday” cover. In 1972, the year in which *The Bird* earned the title of the largest paid weekly newspaper in the state of Georgia, the newspaper believed that it could win the “battle against tyranny, injustice, and the American way!” and the embarrassing “old fashioned Southern belligerence” (Huff, “Happy Birthday” 1). In the same cover, *The Bird* promised that its efforts to voice the beliefs and aspirations of Atlanta’s progressive community were “never ending” (“Happy Birthday” 1). Unfortunately, the Atlanta movement and *The Great Speckled Bird* would only persevere for a few more years.

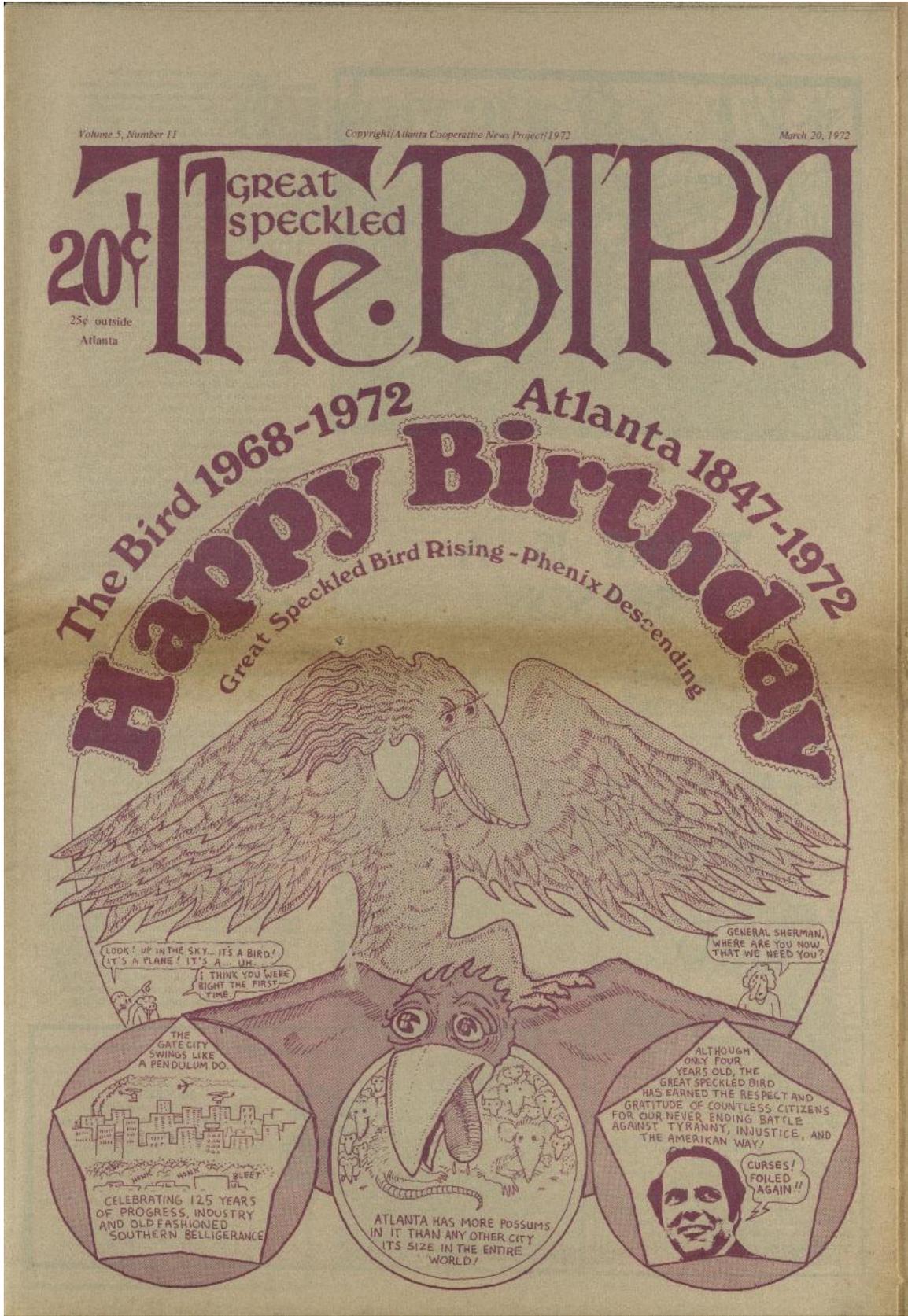


Figure 6

CHAPTER THREE

In October of 1976, *The Great Speckled Bird* published its last issue. The paper that started with a bang in a climate of protest and passion came to an end several years after the movement that once surrounded it had already given up. With the fighting in Vietnam over, the movement folded; with the end of the movement, the underground press lost its audience. Until the end, *The Bird* kept fighting its fight.

The Great Speckled Bird stayed in business even when they met resistance from the police, the FBI, and most branches of “the establishment.” *The Bird* inspired fear in authorities and traditional-minded Atlantans, so much so that their offices were firebombed in 1972, the FBI pressured record companies to remove ads from the underground paper, and *Bird* sellers met frequent arrests. Gene Guerrero, Jr. remembers that “the government was trying to discredit the student movement,” a group that grew in power as the loud and persistent revolutionary left (Guerrero). *The Bird* provided a voice for the movement, and therefore became a target of the forces that wished to stifle their cause.

The Bird's leftist fidelity that kept it flourishing despite efforts from the establishment for almost a decade may have eventually contributed to its end, according to Guerrero. “We lost our credibility,” he said. “We did not offer any independent, thoughtful criticism of the Left.” In a 2012 phone interview, Guerrero continued to describe events such as the 1971 bombing of the U.S. Capitol Building by the Weathermen that *The Bird* failed to criticize in print. “We thought it was crazy, but didn't say so,” he recalled (Guerrero). *The Bird* came out of the counterculture movement, but its unwillingness to question the sometimes-radical actions of the leftist stance that surrounded the movement caused the paper to lose relevance as Atlanta's source for “honest

and interesting and, we trust, even readable journalism” that Tom Coffin described in the inaugural issue (T. Coffin 1). With the movement that once breathed life into *The Bird* dissipating around the country, the paper’s unwavering leftist stance no longer resonated with the young masses.

Except for a few attempts to resurrect *The Bird* in the 1980’s and 2000’s, the newspaper had completed its run (Huff). *The Bird* survived until 1976, years after most of its fellow members of the Underground Press Syndicate folded. In *Uncovering the Sixties*, Abe Peck examines the decline of the underground press across the nation. He quotes a document issued by the C.I.A. on April 26, 1973 titled “Situation Information Report: The Underground Press” (Peck 284). A portion of the report reads:

The underground press is now in decline. It would appear that the vitality of the ‘alternative’ press was directly proportional to the health of the radical movement in general. The underground press arose from the ferment of the times, and the abatement of that ferment has undercut its strength and need.” (Peck 284)

The C.I.A. uses mathematical terms to describe the downfall of the underground press, but the message remains clear: with the movement dwindling, the underground press follows.

In the final issue of *The Great Speckled Bird*, staff writer Berl Boykin puts the passing of the newspaper and its movement into a poem, a form far more appropriate to the paper than a C.I.A. report. The poem, “The Bird; Last Layout” lies along the left side of the inside front cover of the final issue (Figure 6). Berl’s poem serves as a realistic memorial to the newspaper, admitting that the end comes without pomp and pride; Berl writes, “Perhaps heroics are not in

order as the paper dies” (Berl 2). Berl describes the end of *The Bird* as a quiet, unglamorous death, wasting away into irrelevancy. As the C.I.A. document suggests, the paper must die because the movement died. In Berl’s words, *The Bird* of October, 1976 is “removed / From the womb of the streets that gave us birth” (Berl 2). The paper lost its connections to the Fourteenth Street community, to the radical students, and to the bygone coffee houses where staffers used to meet up to discuss politics and hear music performed. The people of the movement gave life to *The Bird*, and the paper could not survive without their sustenance.

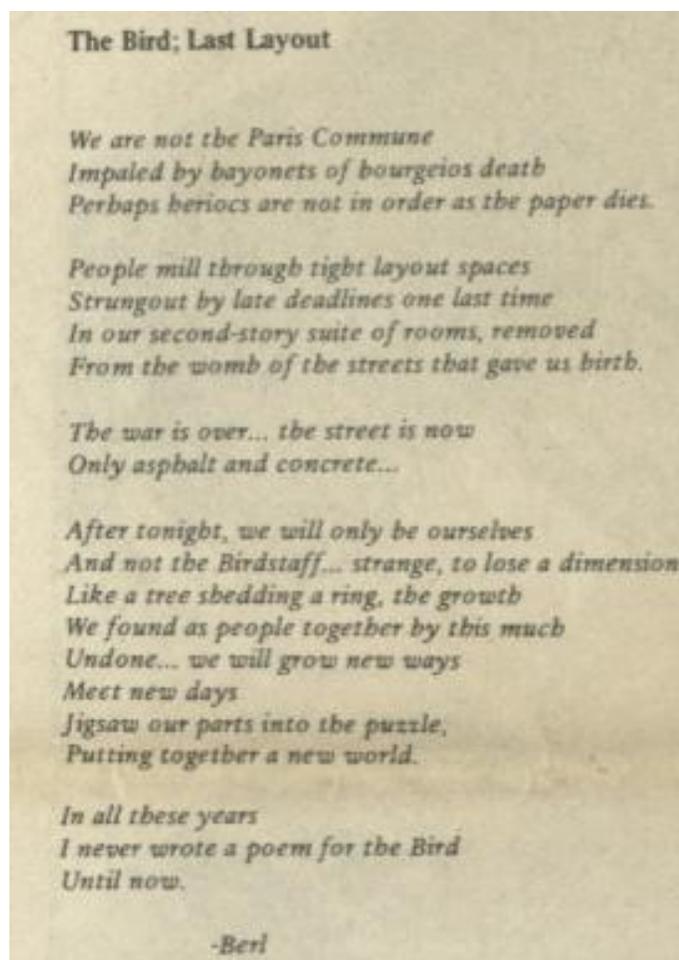


Figure 7

Berl’s lines “The war is over...the street is now / Only asphalt and concrete...” suggest that the Vietnam War, the supreme source of dissidence that sparked the youth movement and the underground press, was the only thing that could keep the movement going. With the end of the war, young people had no draft to protest, no imminent threat to their daily lives looming over them. Ironically, when the war ended, the party was over. By 1976, the visions of love, peace, and groovy creativity that thrived in the streets of midtown Atlanta in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s dried up into “asphalt and concrete,” the beloved materials of the capitalist

establishment (Berl 2). The young people of the movement united over a common cause against the war in Vietnam, and nothing else had the strength to keep them together. Berl closes his letter with a signature line reminiscent of Tom Coffin's sign-off on the mission statement on the first-ever printed page of the newspaper.

The Bird's conclusion in 1976 signaled the end of large-scale youthful political protest in Atlanta. The Fourteenth Street community that bore *The Great Speckled Bird* now consists of trendy, rather yuppie restaurants and flashy skyscrapers. Local music dominates the Atlanta counterculture scene, now located around Little Five Points, Cabbagetown, and East Atlanta, but the style is grungy garage punk. Young Atlantans do not sing or write or seem to care about politics; most songs written and performed in Atlanta today address themes of young love, misguided directions, and cocaine. Local music is rife with Atlanta references and a brand of kitschy pride for "Hate City," the modern day Atlanta punk's take on "The City Too Busy To Hate."

The change in counterculture and youth culture spans beyond I-285, and just as the youth culture of the sixties remained somewhat consistent throughout the nation, national patterns of youth counterculture activities exist today. In "New Songs, Old Message: 'No War,'" an article by Jon Pareles in a 2003 edition of *The New York Times*, Pareles compares anti-war music that cropped up in the early 2000's in response to the Iraq invasion to the music's Vietnam-era predecessors. Pareles describes the sound of the music as evolving "from strum-and-sing to stomp-and-shout," insisting that the Vietnam-era clear lyrics and acoustic guitar style has no place in today's popular music, and that today's anti-war messages take the form of rhythmic beats and heavy chords (Pareles).

According to Pareles, protest music sounds different than it used to because the youth making and listening to the music live in a different age. He writes:

The political pressures that created the 1960's protest-song movement have dissipated. There's no military draft to pull together a constituency and force life-or-death choices on every male teenager. And for the punk and hip-hop generation, there is no recent memory of a long, enervating war. (Pareles)

The youth that came of age during the U.S. occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan feel no immediate need to voice their opinions or attempt to make a difference. They do not have to fight unless they choose to, and the war footage seen on television and online, as Pareles describes, “looks like fireworks and video games, not carnage” (Pareles).

For a generation of kids used to instant gratification, the idea of making music to express concern over unconventional fighting in a faraway land seems like a lot of unnecessary work. We hear that the fighting contributes to high gas prices, and we have to go through horrendous amounts of airport security because the ambiguous enemy might issue an act of terror on an airplane. But, unlike the millions of young adult males whose draft lottery numbers could be called at any time during the Vietnam War, we feel like we live in a different world from the fighting overseas. It does not directly affect us.

In *Politics in Music*, Emory professor Courtney Brown argues that music plays a more crucial role in young people's political ideology today than it did during the Vietnam War era. Brown writes, “music is now a primary player in this increasingly diverse competition for the attention of the masses with respect to the dissemination of political ideas” (Brown 3). Brown believes that music holds greater importance in today's young political minds due to the decrease in popularity in political parties and traditional news sources. Brown argues that today's

technology allows young people to access music and other political information instantly, and this increase in accessibility applies to young people all over the world. Brown describes the way in which advanced technology provides music to youth today as an “informational pipeline,” an image that suggests that political thought pours into young people’s minds through music even when one listens for musical, not political, reasons (Brown 3).

Gene Guerrero, Jr. also sees great potential in today’s technology as a source of political inspiration and communication. In a 2012 phone interview, Guerrero referenced the Occupy movement, and the way in which technology and the Internet make this movement possible. Guerrero suggested that Internet communication may continue to grow as a means of political organization, and doubts that a paper product like *The Great Speckled Bird* could survive today. In this “different time,” Guerrero believes that the underground press is “too old fashioned” (Guerrero). The artistic and political minds of today must adapt with changes in technology in order to be heard.

Some young people in the Atlanta music scene voice their wishes for a return of the days of *The Great Speckled Bird* and the less-technologically-advanced means of musical and political education that Vietnam War-era youth experienced. Jesse Smith, known around town as Gentleman Jesse, has been around the Atlanta underground music scene for several years now. He played with the Carbonas, once one of the most popular punk acts in Atlanta, and now focuses on his projects Gentleman Jesse and His Men and COPS. In a March 2012 interview with Atlanta music magazine *Stomp and Stammer* – the closest thing to *The Bird* in terms of artistic appearance and musical content, but with a politically-conservative editorial slant – Smith describes his love of old vinyl records and distaste for internet-based musical discovery. *Stomp and Stammer* contributor Jhoni Jackson’s article “Gentleman Jesse is a Thief (But He

Means Well)” quotes Smith lamenting, “Internet sensations. Those are the only people who are going to sell tons of records ever again” (Jackson 3). Smith’s latest record, *Leaving Atlanta*, addresses coming to terms with the character of the city today. Jackson quotes Smith, “I’ve never been to a place that’s better than Atlanta. But that doesn’t mean that Atlanta is good” (Jackson 2). The city and its music scene possess a unique character, but that does not mean that local artists, musicians, and activists should stop trying to make Atlanta a more culturally- and politically-rich place.

Despite Smith’s punk background, his latest record, much like the sounds of performers featured in *The Great Speckled Bird*, boasts a sonic quality inspired by older generations of Southern musicians. Jackson charges Smith with blatantly using the music from Georgia-born Little Richard’s “Ready Teddy” in *Leaving Atlanta*’s opening track “Rooting for the Underdog,” an accusation to which Smith replies, “I’m not going to be heartbroken if I have to write Little Richard-slash-Jesse wrote the song” (Jackson 1). Smith maintains and acknowledges his Georgia roots in *Leaving Atlanta*, so much so that he admits to lifting music from his influences’ creations, which signifies the continued importance of place in the city’s music scene and youth culture. Unlike his predecessors in the Atlanta scene, no trace of politics exists in Smith’s catchy brand of rock ‘n’ roll. Jackson does not question the lack of political material in her interview, even when she addresses Smith’s 2008 run-in with street violence in the Little Five Points community; a music journalist in 2012 leaves politics out of her writing because in today’s world, the once explicit link between politics and music no longer stands as it did during the Vietnam War.

Gentleman Jesse, along with many of his fellow Atlanta musicians, release LPs of their latest albums. This turn toward a vintage means of music production suggests that young people

making music and buying albums wish to hear records the way that their parents' generation did. Perhaps the trend of listening to music in the manner of young people during the Vietnam War will lead to the creation of music that addresses themes prevalent in the music of the Vietnam War era. Protest music could eventually come back into fashion in Atlanta's musical counterculture.

Politics no longer dominates the music and lifestyle of Atlanta's youth, and *The Bird* may no longer be available on the streets of Atlanta. Still, the legacy of the Vietnam War-era youth movement remains. The 2011-2012 exhibit at the DeKalb History Center gives a visually stunning testament to the pages of *The Bird* as well as to the Atlanta music scene of *The Bird*'s lifetime. The exhibit serves to expose the paper and the movement to a new generation of young Atlantans while reminding the young-at-heart veterans of the Vietnam War-era movement that their voice can still be heard.

Additionally, Col. Bruce Hampton may not play with the Hampton Grease Band anymore, but he continues to perform around town. He frequently puts on shows at Little Five Points' Variety Playhouse, and a documentary on Hampton, *Basically Frightened: The Music of Col. Bruce Hampton*, premiered at the Atlanta Film Festival on March 30, 2012 ("Col. Bruce Hampton Documentary"). Steve Wise, a founding staff member of *The Bird*, frequents local rock shows at The Star Bar and The Earl. *The Bird* and the movement may be defunct, but the creative forces behind them have not retired.

The letter from the editors on the inside front cover of the last issue of *The Great Speckled Bird*, though written in a serious and somber manner, leaves the reader with a glimmer of hope that *The Bird*'s legacy in and beyond the city that gave the paper its fiery, intelligent, and innovative identity will live on. In small italics at the end of the letter, the text reads, "Resurgens

does not necessarily have to be the motto just for the City of Atlanta. The Phoenix, after all, was a bird, too” (“The Great Speckled Bird” 2). The end of *The Bird* signaled the end of an era, but spirit of *The Great Speckled Bird* will never be extinguished.



Figure 8. “Last Issue.” *The Great Speckled Bird* 9.9 (1976): 1. Georgia State University Library Digital Collections. Web. 2 Apr 2012.

Works Cited

- Berl, "The Bird; Last Layout." *The Great Speckled Bird* 9.9 (1976): 2. *Georgia State University Library Digital Collections*. Web. 31 Mar 2012.
- Brown, Courtney. *Politics in Music*. Atlanta: Farsight Press, 2008.
- "Col. Bruce Hampton Documentary Premieres March 30." *Georgia Music Magazine*. Web. 3 Apr 2012.
- Coffin, Tom. "Chirp." *The Great Speckled Bird* 1.1 (1968): 1. *Georgia State University Library Digital Collections*. Web. 16 Nov 2011.
- "Coming Events." *The Great Speckled Bird* 1.32 (1969): 16. *Georgia State University Library Digital Collections*. Web. 31 Mar 2012.
- Glessing, Robert J. *The Underground Press in America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970.
- Foote, Bud. Curator Notes. *The Great Speckled Bird* Exhibit. Decatur: DeKalb History Center.
- Franics, Miller, Jr. *The Great Speckled Bird* 2.31 (1969): 11. *Georgia State University Library Digital Collections*. Web. 20 Mar 2012.
- Guerrero, Gene, Jr. "Benefit the Community Center." *The Great Speckled Bird* 2.41 (1969): 3. *Georgia State University Library Digital Collections*. Web. 20 Mar 2012.
- "Grease Rap." *The Great Speckled Bird* 2.31 (1969): 11. *Georgia State University Library Digital Collections*. Web. 20 Mar 2012.
- Gwin, Pam. "Free." *The Great Speckled Bird* 2.24 (1969): 3. *Georgia State University Library Digital Collections*. Web. 15 Mar 2012.
- "Happy Birthday." Illustration. *The Great Speckled Bird* 5.11 (1972): 1. *Georgia State University Library Digital Collections*. Web. 3 Apr 2012.

- Harmon, James E. "New Music and Counter-Culture Values." *Youth & Society* 4.1 (1972): 61-83. Web. 20 Feb. 2012.
- Huff, Christopher Allen. "Great Speckled Bird." *The New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 27 Oct. 2011. Web. <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-3455>. 24 Jan 2012.
- "Irving 'Bud' Foote." *Living History Program*. Georgia Institute of Technology, n.d. Web. 20 Mar 2012.
- Jackson, Jhoni. "Gentleman Jesse is a Thief (But He Means Well)." *Stomp and Stammer* 12 Mar 2012: 1-3. Web. 31 Mar 2012.
- Kornbluth, Jesse. "This Place of Revolution Has No Fire Exit: The Underground Press and How It Went." *The Antioch Review* 29.1 (1969): 91-99. 20 Feb 2012.
- Leamer, Laurence. *The Paper Revolutionaries: The Rise of the Underground Press*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972.
- Lipsitz, George. "Who'll Stop the Rain? Youth Culture, Rock 'n' Roll, and Social Crises." *The Sixties: From Memory to History*. Ed. David Farber. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. 206-234. Digital File.
- Merry Christmas of Bashan, Og. "Maybe, Virginia, and Then Again, Maybe Not." *The Great Speckled Bird* 2.41 (1969): 10. *Georgia State University Library Digital Collections*. Web. 20 Mar 2012.
- "Our People | Our Town." *The Great Speckled Bird* 2.24 (1969): 2-3. *Georgia State University Library Digital Collections*. Web. 15 Mar 2012.
- Peck, Abe. *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press*. New York: Citadel Press, 1985.
- "Real Classy, Fine Ads!" *The Great Speckled Bird* 1.1 (1968): 8. . *Georgia State University*

Library Digital Collections. Web. 20 Feb 2012.

Red, Jimmy the. "Mace." *The Great Speckled Bird* 2.24 (1969): 2-3. *Georgia State University*

Library Digital Collections. Web. 15 Mar 2012.

"Resistance to the Draft: Southern Cross Section." *The Great Speckled Bird* 1.1 (1968): 2.

Georgia State University Library Digital Collections. Web. 15 Mar 2012.

"Southern Mobilization Planning Conference." Advertisement. *The Great Speckled Bird* 1.32

(1969): 16. *Georgia State University Library Digital Collections*. Web. 31 Mar 2012.

Spates, James L. "Counterculture and Dominant Culture Values: A Cross-National Analysis of the Underground Press and Dominant Culture Magazines." *American Sociological*

Review 41.5 (1976): 868-883. Web. 20 Feb. 2012.

"The Great Speckled Bird." *The Great Speckled Bird* 9.9 (1976): 2. *Georgia State University*

Library Digital Collections. Web. 31 Mar 2012.

Turkey Trip by Atlantis Rising Productions. Advertisement. *Great Speckled Bird* 24 Nov 1969:

24. *Georgia State University Library Digital Collections*. Web. 20 Mar 2012.

Unterberger, Richie. *Unknown Legends of Rock 'n' Roll: Psychedelic Unknowns, Mad Geniuses, Punk Pioneers, Lo-fi Mavericks & More*. San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 1998.

"Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus." *Newseum*, n.d. Web. 20 Mar 2012.

Non-Printed Sources

Coffin, Stephanie. Personal Interview. 3 Apr 2012.

Guerrero, Gene, Jr. Personal Interview. 26 Mar. 2012.