

# Michigan Voice

VOL. 7, NO. 7, OCTOBER 1983

MICHIGAN'S ALTERNATIVE NEWSPAPER

FREE

## Michigan's Hidden Salvadorans

by Michael Moore

There was one convenient aspect of the Vietnam War — 10,000 miles away, the closest you got to a Vietnamese was on a 25-inch diagonal screen.

With the war in El Salvador, they're knocking on your back door.

The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service estimates that there are over 500,000 Salvadoran refugees — *ten percent of the entire population of El Salvador* — hiding out in the United States. They have sought refuge, ironically, in the country which supplies the weapons that have killed their spouses, parents and children. Thirty thousand Salvadorans have been killed in the last three years. Thousands more have been arrested, tortured or have disappeared.

To many, Michigan seems like a lot safer place to be.

Though no one knows for sure how many Salvadorans are hiding out in Michigan, most people who are helping Central American refugees in this state estimate that there are hundreds — maybe thousands — living undercover, mostly in the Detroit and Lansing areas.

The speculation is that many Salvadorans want to get to Canada which, unlike the U.S., will grant them political asylum. There are growing communities of Salvadorans in Windsor and Toronto, so Detroit becomes the last stop on an underground railroad to freedom.

But for some Salvadorans, this last stop has become the hardest.

Gracilia had lived through a lot of hardship in San Salvador. The last thing she expected in the U.S. was to be thrown in jail.

Four years ago, Gracilia's brother, Martino, was arrested by the police and imprisoned without a trial.

"All he did was work at the University," Gracilia told the *Voice* in an interview held in southwest Detroit. "He didn't belong to any political organization and was not involved with any rebels. But if you are connected with the University in any way, you are considered against the government."

In October of 1982, Martino was released after a group of bishops touring the prison came upon him and demanded to know why he was being confined without any charges. Upon their insistence he was released.

Martino came into the city to live with Gracilia. He was disabled from the torture he experienced in prison. He said the soldiers beat his knees with their gun butts,



Michael Moore

Gracilia, a Salvadoran refugee, hiding out in Detroit.

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by Jeanie Wylie

## Triple Jeopardy

Someday They'll Leave Darnell Summers Alone

Independence Day, 1980 — Darnell Summers was playing with his jazz band at a military base in Frankfurt, West Germany. The black, Michigan-born, army veteran startled military officials when he leaned toward his GI audience, 30% of which was black, and asked whose independence the U.S. celebrates. He reminded his listeners that the founding fathers owned slaves.

Summers alluded to the then-current Iranian hostage crisis. "Who are the real hostages?" he asked. "We are."

By Independence Day, 1982, Summers was in a German jail awaiting extradition to the United States. Rather than being able to spend his time attempting to persuade American GIs not to fight in the third world, Summers found himself protesting his extradition in German courts.

Extradition law forbids deportation for political activity, but Summers was charged with a criminal offense — one that he had been charged with 13 years previously, he told the German courts. The charges had been dismissed for a lack of evidence.

But the U.S. officials in Germany, with direct legal advice from Alexander Haig (then secretary of state), persuaded the German government that their prosecution would be successful this time. The U.S. claimed two witnesses who had been afraid to testify before were prepared to now bring Summers to justice.

The charge was murder of a Michigan State Police Red Squad officer. Sgt. Robert Gonsler was shot and killed on the morning of August 8, 1968 in Inkster, MI a largely black Detroit suburb created by Henry Ford when he wanted to provide segregated housing for his workers. Gonsler, 33, was in the act of surveilling the Malcolm X Cultural Center when he was killed.

Summers, then 23, was in Inkster in August of that year because the U.S. Army had given him two months leave before they planned to ship him to Vietnam. Even then, Summers was outspoken in his criticism of

America's racism and war mentality. He was increasingly well-read in Karl Marx and Mao Tse Tung and, as was the case with the Black Panthers and others, he did not espouse a nonviolent approach to change.

"I became totally involved in the struggle of Black people in Inkster against the oppressive policies of the government," Summers wrote in 1982. "The city made a few concessions and gave up a building for our programs which we called the Malcolm X Cultural Center (MXCC). A lot of us were accepting the particular analysis that Malcolm had at that time, in terms of not prostrating oneself or supplicating oneself or just getting on your knees and begging the bourgeoisie, the ruling class, the government for anything.

"That's when the trouble started," Summers continued. "When the city realized that we were not going to promote any of their sell-out schemes, Uncle Toms and

bootlickers, they sent in the FBI, CIA and lesser slugs to destroy what we had struggled for. We became 'criminals.' Strange things began to happen. As we would leave our homes for the MXCC, we realized we were being followed by unidentified persons. We received threatening phone calls. On several occasions we were leaving MXCC late at night after having administered a full day of educational programs, we came under gunfire. The police of course were never able to find out who was doing the shooting."

On the night of August 7, Summers was hand-delivered a letter from the mayor by the police. It required the changing of the name of the Malcolm X Cultural Center within 24 hours. In the early morning hours of the next day, Gonsler and his partner Frederick Prysby passed a car of armed black people. Prysby reports that they heard fire, Gonsler said, "I am hit," and

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