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**Civil Rights Heroes (Workers and Volunteers) on Face Book**

added 2 new photos — with Christopher Brandon McKham-Gilkes.

July 7, 2016 ·

This one hurts. RIP #CivilRightsVeteran #SNCC Custom Motorcycle Designer Photographer Cliff Vaughs.

Read!

The Vintagent

Monday, January 09, 2012

CLIFF VAUGHS AND 'EASY RIDER'

Cliff Vaughs ca.1974, on one of his custom-built HD choppers  
The origin story of the 'Easy Rider' motorcycles, 'Captain America' and 'Billy's bike' (as they're now known), has been clouded by the very fact of their fame, the absence of their creator, and the odd, at times haphazard circumstances of the making of the film. Credit has at times been given to Dan Haggerty ('Grizzly Adams'), and many web and print stories repeat this misunderstanding; Haggerty did some repair to the machines and was their 'handler' at times, and possibly even re-created the 'ER' bikes, after they were used in most of the filming, and stolen before the movie was complete. [The Vintagent posted the story of Ben Hardy and the building of the 'ER' bikes, in March 2009.

Cliff Vaughs today

Credit for the design of the 'Easy Rider' bikes (and other important aspects of the film, including the title!) goes to Cliff Vaughs, a civil rights activist, filmmaker, and biker (in the Chosen Few MC - a racially integrated club since 1960). Vaughs was a member of the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), a direct-action civil rights group, and a figure in many of the famous sit-ins, freedom rides, and marches in the 1960s South. He participated in, and photographed, many of the legendary civil rights confrontations of the era, although he missed the March on Washington because he was "building a chopper" in his backyard.

Thus far, the only image associated with Vaughs' civil rights documentary; 'What Will the Harvest Be?'

Vaughs was also a documentary film maker, and made "What Will the Harvest Be?", about the rise of Black Power in the South, which included interviews with Martin Luther King, Stokeley Carmichael, and Julian Bond, and was aired on ABC-tv in the mid-60s. From documentaries, he moved into film production by the late 1960s. He was also, clearly, a motorcycle nut, and considered Ben Hardy his mentor in building, maintaining, and riding his machines.

Cliff Vaughs being dragged by National Guard troops at Cambridge, MD, May 2, 1964. Incredibly, this photo was taken (and c.) by photographer Danny Lyon, whose photo essay of time spent with the Chicago Outlaws MC is documented in his fantastic book 'The Bikeriders'. I look forward to exploring the story of these two 'outlaw' bikers, one black one white, in the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

When asked about his involvement with the 'Easy Riders' choppers, Cliff Vaughs sent the following statement to The Vintagent:

"I was working in the News Department at KRLA when Henry Fonda's son, Peter, was arrested for possession of marijuana. I was mildly amused that so much interest was engendered by the incident, considering the number of citizens detained and incarcerated for smoking "pot".

We chatted for a while at the courthouse and I called in my story. He was interested in my hobby: designing and building motorcycles. It turned out that we lived in the same neighborhood, West Hollywood. I told him I was usually found in my back yard enjoying my hobby.

Peter Fonda with his father, Henry. It must be the the late 60s; Dad has a paisley shirt.

He came by a few days later accompanied by Dennis Hopper, whom I hadn't seen since his performance in "Rebel Without A Cause" with James Dean. We talked and I learned that they [Fonda and Hopper] had been planning to

I agreed that the themes of the

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Susan Mansour, erstwhile  
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t at my home in West  
develop interest in the movie  
town well enough to raise  
long background in the  
design and build the  
Captain America and Bucky  
s: red-white-blue. I was  
named our company Pando.  
motorcycle with his sidekick,

Baird Bryant as Director of  
as Production Manager.  
Black, Seymour Cassel,  
Jack Nicholson was hired after  
Nicholson and Snyder (?) who  
erry Southern, credited with the  
proceeded admirably until the  
about how much film was  
was summarily fired from the  
s was awarded "Best New

as actors or participants in the  
production long after 'ER' was

e accidents were so high that I  
d "Not So Easy"[1973], an  
safely. Filmfair financed the film  
avidson provided Evel Knievel,  
had Evel Knievel's Coliseum  
) motorcycle drill team. Two of  
eared on film: "Rabbit", and  
iewing at judicial traffic school

It by me in my back yard. My  
sisted me wholeheartedly. We  
irst motorcycle, a 1947  
oloped over years of repairing  
e. Jim Magnera of MC Supply  
as my agent when Harley  
ovel head) which required a  
Magnera was also active in  
terprise in South Central Los  
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'Billy' bikes, built by Cliff

rication, Dean Lanza, art work,  
gines: rebuilt by Mr. Hardy. I  
also designed and constructed  
id wanted something unique  
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machines, the registration (pink  
sked Mr. Hardy to assemble  
was simply too busy with the  
mplete them at home.

resented only a few months out

is and with the talented people I

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in anyone.  
ontribution to the production of

ustom motorcycles" since ER.  
Hardy et al are now  
vidson had "Low Rider".  
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g life. I was riding my "chopper"  
Rock; pursuing an assignment  
ad with me a staff member of  
A pickup truck passed us going  
around. They took a shot at us  
as any further...so I lived to tell

be found in comics of WW II.  
y. Captain America's ride was a

l Roth's Choppers magazine in  
gths gave these views on film

WORLD OF CYCLING?

orcycle, it's the final romantic  
ly the frontier is gone. The  
nothing—just a basket, and  
ly put yourself into it. This goes  
ing new designs, sissy bars,

WITH A CHOPPER?

who have basically been  
d but I do view my bike as  
myself. I have been riding since  
n because I was building a  
d I'm very concerned about the  
most states against the rider.  
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YOUR NEW FILM?

get around on. It's like the  
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ms and are into their own bag.  
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'AMERICAN  
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... of cultural things. They are in  
... that's going on. A lot of bikers  
... whole weight of having to deal  
...cludes any awareness of other  
...tering culture. You must  
...im where they can project  
...leet the Press," he would give  
...triotism, etc."  
...indicated that one of the main  
...wn the whole idea of black and  
...ation showed that white clubs  
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...n where the two main  
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...ry up-tight, scared and shaken  
...ack cats just say, "Can we help  
.../. And that to me seems a real  
...en and it does in real life there  
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ONLY CONFINED TO THE  
...RS IN THE NEGATIVE:  
...act that these black cats  
...ad."

...himself: after 45 years, Peter  
..., in an email of October 2014:

...rd others are that you knew  
... . Dennis and I had no idea.  
...e! You again amazed us when  
...ately \$1250.00 per bike. We  
...ities. You built two Billy Bikes  
.../ou and your girlfriend coming  
...e going to shoot in New

...re began filming in New  
...re been ready based on what

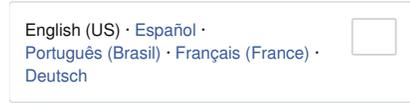
...il Lewis, and Bert Schneider to  
...ot having the bikes ready after  
...have the script ready. This  
...ch was beyond my control and I  
...ry. Neither did I decide to drop  
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...ve.

...ember 2014: The final design of  
...r. Cliff Vaughs. I gave Cliff a  
... 1 September 27th 1967. It was  
...igh sissy bar, the big  
...had on the motorcycle from  
...jeous heavily raked front  
...adible!!! Thank you Cliff!!!!  
...e praise you deserve in

...ir expertise in determining

scene Captain America bike.

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ts of relevance did an entire tent you have here Paul , so

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of Jewish descent and 1% er's at were in fact created by Afro sence music , who's roots came

d , yet cry on the other knowing which popular culture now

subject up here and giving

Cliff's contribution, so often the film's release,has been the bullshit and fantasy on the wasn't involved. Your article s. Truly wonderful to see Mr ttle . . . let's hope his fifteen re rides off on the great r this superb piece !!!

f those bikes and the myths on to this.

showing in Hollyweird waiting a than a little pissed off at the ough. When you show people ' you are they get scared and angerous combination. Good

kid watching 'bob-jobs' in awe

had the honor of meeting n Venice Ca. he was looking at ed myself and we spoke about ighs. dudes game, but just like rock

get that. It was the first time I

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 native article.

u for a time. I didn't know he  
of a Triumph displayed at the

civil rights movement cronies.  
 ainly because I wasn't there...  
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 it to my kids."  
 g and building the most famous

a photographic evidence of  
 jag, but Dr. Sprocket was kind  
 LOT OF PHOTOS of early  
 he 1950s and beyond. click  
[-sprocket-makes-anoth.../](#)

J has a wonderful story to tell. I  
 s to share with all of us. He is a  
 or a new generation to know

i for sharing. I've added one to

black bikers making these

'race' at my high school during  
 n Easy Riders poster. 40 some  
 le it before I could collect it.

inks. Your site really is my #1  
 < you and keep up the great

ar is true. I know because we  
 of EASY RIDER's production. I  
 contribution has not occurred

bring about the enormously

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red with the USN, living at  
 Rider" was released and I saw  
 D.C. Auto Show (don't  
 Captain America cycle and,  
 it was my assumption at the  
 one that Dan Haggerty built  
 poster, the one shown in your

bikes appears at odds with  
 Billy Bike" and then look at  
 Jillt at the time. That was pretty  
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 t unlikely he would have  
 ers ever and then just stopped.

oung film maker and chopper  
 asy Rider' and a partner in  
 o machines?

bout the 'Easy Rider' bikes,  
 ared from the film/bike scene  
 d a few interviews myself, of  
 all have independently and  
 if 'Easy Rider', and the design

ry Hardy - as a mentor- which  
 f is also clear that he designed  
 hem to several people,  
 th Hardy before 'Easy Rider',  
 t is firm in his claim as designer  
 ve no record that Hardy ever

re he has backed Hardy as the  
 ever met Sugar Bear, and vice

ents' section, I just thought I'd  
 publish in the 'comments' - Ed.]

to really created Easy Rider".

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 tiredly. Benny was the sort of  
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 r. Vaughs motivation was. Just  
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 bikes were stolen and likely

nd never built another chopper.  
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hich is very interesting. As far  
 who built the bikes' was on the  
 wledged 'a couple of black  
 redit for these incredibly  
 for him...but I've met Fonda  
 never met Dennis Hopper.

ghts, not just about ER, but his  
 Os, his friendship with  
 SNCC, etc.

d by three people via Facebook  
 rring this period. Each of them  
 film, and his activities in LA at  
 Cliff in the intervening years,  
 'act that he's not 'known' today  
 years ago...but what happened  
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east - a critical role in the 'look'  
 re much reason to doubt  
 .which could have been a  
 but will. No doubt Hardy  
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r Hardy, there would be no 'ER'  
 s his importance at the time.  
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 . In my dealings with other,  
 nan who gets the credit, and a  
 Thus it was with Peter Fonda...  
 together, and see what we can

discussion still rages.  
 h lists all the contributors to the

origin [of the 'Easy Rider' bikes

t" I realized that I had never  
 acks in this film about America.  
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ide Motorcycles today. It is nice  
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