

# Austin Weekly



## TIGAR <sup>by</sup> the TAIL

UT Professor Michael Tigar  
Fights Racism in South Africa  
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# Austin Weekly

VOL. 5, NO. 5

February 6-12, 1991

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*U.T. professor Michael Tigar fights apartheid in South Africa. Story by Arnie Montemayor. Cover photo by Hans-Peter Otto.*

**Dining Guide** ..... 13  
*For a comprehensive review of restaurants in and around Austin, be sure and check out Austin Weekly's bi-annual Dining Guide. Text by Maryanne Mariotti, Melissa Ann Nichols and Michael Lauder. Photos by Hans-Peter Otto.*

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# Battling Racism

## At Home And Abroad

*University of Texas law professor teaches courtroom skills to black South African lawyers*

By Arnie Montemayor

University of Texas law professor Michael Tigar sat anxiously as his plane prepared to land in Johannesburg, South Africa. The pilot's voice came over the intercom: "Welcome to Jan Smits Airport, serving Johannesburg and Pretoria. Set your watches back 30 years."

Tigar smiled. Thirty years ago, he was a student on the campus of Berkeley, participating in civil rights demonstrations. Now he was in South Africa, where he had once again enlisted to fight in the battle for equality.

Since 1988, Tigar and a handful of other attorneys have spent portions of their summers in South Africa teaching black litigators how to fight apartheid, the strict racial segregation policy that has existed since 1948.

Tigar, whose credentials as a freedom fighter include legal defense work for the Chicago Seven and Angela Davis, said he was excited by the prospect of teaching in South Africa. "After all," he said, "cross examination of a witness or challenging the admissibility of a confession all involve the same tactics of persuasion no matter what legal system you are in."

While South Africa's legal system is unfair to blacks, Tigar said that teaching black South African lawyers better litigation skills can help them overcome constitutional discrimination.

At the time of his first trip, Tigar was looking forward to taking his seat as chairman of the 50,000-member Litigation Section of the American Bar Association, which was exploring ways to expand its participation in South Africa.

Today, at age 50, a relatively docile Tigar spends most of his free time with his wife, one time student Amanda Birrell, and his six-year-old daughter, Elizabeth. The three share a spacious home in the West Lake Hills area of Austin.

But his involvement in South Africa is by no means the first unconventional cause that he has adopted. It is instead the culmination of a long and successful career rooted in going against the grain.

Born in Glendale, Calif., a racially segregated area, he attended Berkeley School of Law during the civil rights era, graduating first in his class in 1966. There his radical propensities emerged as he explored left-wing political activities and even flew to Helsinki for an international youth festival with representatives from the Soviet Union.

Tigar's radical commitments became strong enough to cost him a Supreme Court internship with William Brennan. After Tigar was already accepted for the position, pressure from the conservative wing of the Supreme Court forced Brennan to withdraw the offer.

Tigar's search for other employment may have changed the direction of his career. He went to work for noted criminal defense attorney Edward Bennett Williams in Washington. Williams became Tigar's mentor, and the two formed a lasting friendship.

In 1968, Tigar took a huge cut in pay to serve as editor-in-chief of the *Selective Service Law Reporter*, a journal for lawyers defending military draft resisters who opposed the Vietnam war. Meanwhile, he continued to

work for Williams on weekends to supplement his pay.

In 1969, Tigar was appointed to the faculty of the University of California at Los Angeles. During this time, he worked with William



Michael Tigar

Kunstler in defending the Chicago Seven, a group of radical protestors arrested at the 1968 Democratic Convention.

When Tigar arrived at UCLA, Dr. Angela Davis, a black philosophy teacher, had just been hired as well. In 1970, she was charged with kidnapping, murder and conspiracy in connection with the shooting of a judge at the Marin County Courthouse. Weapons purchased by Davis were allegedly used in the shooting and, although she wasn't present when the shooting occurred, she was accused of planning the operation.

Davis asked for Tigar's help. Tigar assisted in the defense, and Davis was acquitted on all counts. Shortly afterwards, disenchanted with California politics, Michael Tigar resigned from UCLA.

Tigar returned to Bennett's law firm in Washington, and he and Williams successfully defended then Texas Gov. John Connally, the former Treasury Secretary under Richard Nixon, who was accused of accepting a bribe from a dairy lobby in exchange for political favors.

In a precedent-setting case, Tigar successfully brought a wrongful death action against Chile involving the assassination of Orlando Letelier, a former Chilean ambassador, winning a \$2.9 million judgment. It was the first wrongful death suit brought in the United States against a foreign nation, and remains one of Tigar's crowning achievements.

From 1978 to 1983, Tigar ran his own law firm in Washington. He came to Austin in 1983 to accept an endowed chair at the University of Texas Law School.

Tigar has been able to use his chairmanship in the ABA to rally support for some important causes. Highest on this agenda are the need to increase participation by females and

minorities in the legal field and to encourage more pro bono work to benefit poorer defendants. Little surprise that Tigar, a man so dedicated to justice, should be drawn to the injustices of apartheid and South Africa.

"Johannesburg is a great deal like Houston," said Tigar. "But the sight of the South African military police walking down city streets with uzis chained to their waist quickly dispels any similarity."

The population of South Africa is 70% black. The white presence there began in 1652 when the Dutch East India Company landed settlers on the Cape of Good Hope. These people came to be known as Boers, or Afrikaners, and they spoke a Dutch dialect called Afrikaans.

The discovery of diamonds and gold caused an influx of "outlanders" into Africa. This increased the value of the colony, and in 1899 what the British called the "inevitable" war with the Boers finally broke out. The defeat of the Boers

in 1902 is what led to the birth of the Union of South Africa—and eventually to the beginning of apartheid.

According to Tigar, there is more freedom around hotels and other public places in South Africa to give visitors the impression that segregation is not the problem it is publicized to be. But to see the real South Africa, one need only travel a few miles outside Johannesburg to the Black Township of Soweto.

"The dominant theme of all Soweto is one of severe Third World poverty," said Tigar. "There is little, if any, running water or electricity, and heating and cooking are done with very heavy, sulfurous coal, and wood which is ill suited for the purpose. To go into Soweto in the evening is to walk into a cloud of heavy smoke," said Tigar. "Your eyes burn and it is difficult even to breathe, while the level of despair and anger is so overwhelming; it is simply horrible."

An altitude of 6,000 feet makes the air in Soweto thin and dry. Nothing grows there because the military strips the brush from around the city as a precaution so that in the event of an uprising the police can quickly

surround the township. Military police are constantly stationed just outside the city to further insure quick action.

Sadly, Tigar reflected that, "The thing about Soweto which is to me the most striking is not that the worst parts of Soweto are as bad as they are, but that much of it is no worse than some urban ghettos I've been to in the United States."

The ghettoization of blacks in America urban areas has some parallels in South Africa, Tigar said. For example, the blacks who live in Soweto come into Johannesburg from the townships, they work and then return home to their rural slums. The same type of urban collectivism exists in the United States, with the same combination of economic and racial factors drawing people together.

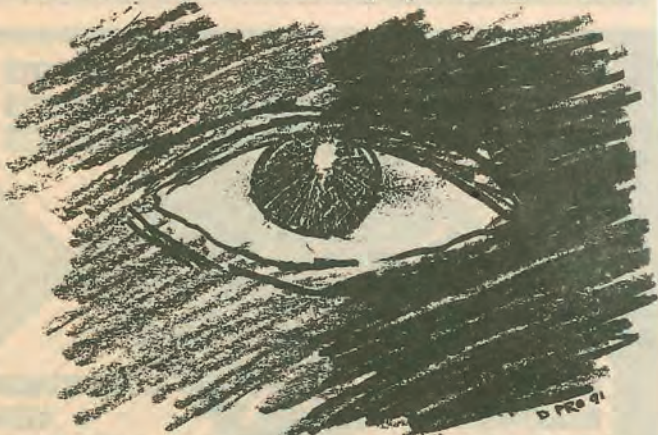
Tigar noted another similarity between these areas and the rural *colonias* in the lower Rio Grande Valley.

However, black South Africans face an obstacle which never troubled their American counterparts. No provision in the South African Constitution guarantees any rights to black he said. At least civil rights leaders in the United States could look to the Constitution to fight discrimination. South Africans cannot because in their country racism is constitutional.

"The most helpful way to view the problem of racism is to understand that white people in metropolitan countries are . . . a minority (among world populations) and that their attempts to impose their views and solutions on the world is doomed to failure," Tigar said.

"In order to illicit change we must see ourselves involved in a world-wide process don't see any single solution to racism," Tigar said. "The solution to the problem will arise as these things usually do, through struggle and, more importantly, through attempting to understand struggle."

**"The most helpful way to view the problem of racism is to understand that white people in metropolitan countries are . . . a minority (among world**



**populations) and that their attempts to impose their views and solutions on the world is doomed to failure."**

**— Michael Tigar**



FASHION

Continued From Page 10

which recognizes only three artists for original design, is judged on uniqueness, and Menlo was the only American winner.

However, it is not only artistic ability that has catapulted Menlo into the forefront of contemporary jewelry; it is her technical ability as well.

Menlo uses the lost wax process to create metal work. In this process, the artist sculpts



Menlo's designs are versatile and may be worn as either pins or pendants.

The work in wax and goes through a complicated process of sprewwing, which uses sprewws to direct metal flow. The best way to visualize this process is to think of three to seven jewelry pieces such as rings which are attached to a wax tree much like leaves. After the pieces are sprewwed, they are baked, filed, cleaned and cast. Finally, the stone is added to the work.

Many of Menlo's works are characterized by fluid movement and hollow images. "I enjoy making dangling pieces and art that moves," said Menlo. "I also like making things

that appear symmetrical but don't really match."

For example, Menlo has a variety of two-toned earrings with gold and silver on reversed sides. She also may dangle moving gems within hollow forms or create one of her specialties — wedding bands.

"Many people ask for bands that are similar yet different and I try to create pieces that have only a touch of similarity through their form or movement," said Menlo.

Most distinctive about her form is the versatility of each piece.

"The pins can be worn as pendants or the buttons can be worn as pins," said Menlo. One piece, a silver pendant with a black druzy quartz (a black crystal), served equally well as a pin or pendant. Her vast collection of buttons can also be worn as comfortably as buttons on a suit sleeve or pins decorating a sweater collar.

Similarly, Menlo's necklaces are also quite versatile. For example, many of her necklaces are left open much like a choker. The opening left in the necklaces could be left alone or one of her pendants could be attached to the piece, creating two necklaces in one.

Menlo's works are not limited to women's personal jewelry sphere. She was once commissioned to make a breast plate for a Torah, which is a copy of the Old Testament. The breast plate is the outer cover of the Torah scrolls. The work was done in silver and a large gold stone was placed in the middle of the piece.

Menlo has recently begun creating men's jewelry such as cuff links and tuxedo buttons.

Louise A. Sklar has been writing about fashion-related topics for four years.

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