



The Wittliff Collections

Southwestern Writers Collection

Southwestern & Mexican Photography Collection

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JIM HIGHTOWER DONATES ARCHIVES TO THE WITTLIFF COLLECTIONS

Photograph by Pier Carlo Abate

SAN MARCOS, TX — National radio commentator, syndicated political columnist, public speaker, and *New York Times* best-selling author **Jim Hightower** has donated his archives to the Wittliff Collections at Texas State University-San Marcos.

Branded “America’s #1 Populist,” Hightower believes the true political spectrum is not right-to-left but bottom-to-top, and he is dedicated to battling the powers-that-be on behalf of—in his words—the “powers-that-ought-to-be”: consumers, working families, farmers, environmentalists, small business owners, and “just plain folks.”

Hightower’s daily radio commentaries—in their seventeenth year of broadcasting—are now carried by more than 150 commercial and public stations, on the web, and on Radio for Peace International. His weekly column is distributed nationally by Creators Syndicate, his columns appear in over 120 newspapers, and his blogs are accessible on Alternet, Huffington Post, and many popular websites.

Launched in 1999, his monthly populist newsletter, *The Hightower Lowdown*, is the fastest-growing political publication in America, with more than 135,000 subscribers across the country. The hard-hitting *Lowdown*, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in print this February, has received both the Alternative Press Award and the Independent Press Association Award for best national newsletter. A sought-after public speaker, the sharp-witted Hightower delivers about 100 speeches a year, and he is a frequent guest on television and radio programs.

Hightower has written seven books including, *Thieves in High Places: They've Stolen*

Our Country and It's Time to Take It Back; If the Gods Had Meant Us to Vote They Would Have Given Us Candidates; There's Nothing in the Middle of the Road but Yellow Stripes and Dead Armadillos; and his most recent, *Swim Against the Current: Even a Dead Fish Can Go with the Flow*, co-authored with his longtime "co-conspirator," Susan DeMarco.

Hightower was raised in Denison, Texas, in a family of independent business people, tenant farmers, and working stiff. After graduating from the University of North Texas, he served in Washington, D.C., as legislative aide to Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas. He then co-founded the Agribusiness Accountability Project, a public-interest project focused on corporate power in the food economy, and he was national coordinator of the 1976 "Fred Harris for President" campaign. Harris, a former Democratic Senator from Oklahoma, largely targeted the party's activist base with his liberal/populist positions on campaign issues.

In 1976, Hightower returned to his home state, where he became editor of the biweekly *Texas Observer* succeeding Molly Ivins, whose personal library also resides at the Wittliff Collections. Hightower served as director of the Texas Consumer Association before running for statewide office and being elected to two terms as Texas Agriculture Commissioner (1983-1991) where he became involved in the Farm Aid effort, working with Willie Nelson and screenwriter-photographer Bill Wittliff, founder of the Collections. In the 1990s Hightower hosted two radio talk shows and began developing his radio commentaries, writing books, and giving speeches, which he has been doing ever since alongside publishing the *Lowdown*.

"The Wittliff Collections fit me like a comfortable old boot," Hightower says, "for the archives are populist in nature. Not only do they depict our region's broad sweep of grassroots voices, but the Wittliff team also knows how to present its treasure trove of materials in ways that appeal to ordinary folks as well as scholars. It's an honor to join the team."

THE HIGHTOWER ARCHIVES

Wittliff Collections curator Connie Todd, together with assistant curator Steve Davis and lead archivist Katie Salzmann, recently picked up over 100 boxes from Hightower at his office in Austin, Texas. The Hightower Papers document every aspect of his long and prolific career, including the many inimitable "Hightowerisms" (such as "The water won't clear up 'til we get the hogs out of the creek") for which he's become famous. Materials are expected to reach approximately 200 linear feet once everything is re-housed in archival boxes and the inventory process is complete.

Items have been well organized by Hightower and his assistant, Melody Byrd, and separated into categories such as Commentary Files, Show Files, Show Tapes, Book Files, *Lowdowns*, Promotional Items, Speeches, Videos, and Travel. Various posters and memorabilia from his populist ventures are also included.

Each of the radio commentaries, for example, is filed by year and date, and each file includes Hightower's handwritten first draft and edits, backup research plus fact checks for each commentary, the final script, and a cue sheet for the broadcast. His syndicated

column features the text from these “Common Sense Commentaries.” The audiotapes themselves are preserved on reels, cassettes, and CDs.

Hightower’s roots in populism are documented in boxes of materials from Yarborough’s, Harris’s, and Hightower’s political campaigns.

Also of note are approximately 600 photographs his staff is currently digitizing. Among these are shots of Hightower speaking, politicking, and attending various events, as well as pictures with such luminaries as Cesar Chavez, Willie Nelson, Robert Redford, Ann Richards, Molly Ivins, Granny D, Ted Kennedy, and others. Photographs of Hightower with Dan Rather, for example, capture them in discussion during the filming of his *60 Minutes* interview in the 1980s. The originals, plus the digitized files, will be housed with his archives at the Wittliff Collections.

One of the earliest pieces among the papers is a small document from 1964: a Certificate of Exemption From Poll Tax issued to a 21-year-old Hightower, then a junior at the University of North Texas, because he was a first-time voter. Finally abolished in Texas in 1966 as unconstitutional, the poll tax was designed to deter poor people, especially blacks and Latino-Americans, from voting, an issue in the Civil Rights Movement that inspired the young Hightower to set out on a political path.

“We here at the Wittliff Collections are thrilled to have such a comprehensive archive covering Jim Hightower’s distinguished and eventful career,” says Wittliff curator Connie Todd. “J. Frank Dobie said on many occasions that good writing transcends its region but never ignores its native soil. Jim’s work fully embodies this idea, and in these times of dynamic political activity, we look forward to showcasing his materials and his conversation as a voice distinctively southwestern and globally significant.”

Hightower has designated the Wittliff Collections as the official repository for his legacy and will continue to gift materials as his career progresses. His weekly columns, radio commentaries, excerpts from the *Lowdown*, and other Hightower information can be accessed on his website, www.jimhightower.com.

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INSTRUCTING | ILLUMINATING | INSPIRING

THE WITTLIFF COLLECTIONS offer a dynamic archival, exhibition, programming, and research environment designed to further the cultural legacy of the region’s literary and photographic arts, and foster “the spirit of place” in the wider world. THE SOUTHWESTERN WRITERS COLLECTION preserves and exhibits the literary papers and artifacts of principal writers, filmmakers, and musicians, including the major archives of such noted authors as Cormac McCarthy, Sam Shepard, and John Graves, as well as the production archives of *Texas Monthly* magazine, Fox’s animated series *King of the Hill*, and the CBS miniseries *Lonesome Dove*. THE SOUTHWESTERN & MEXICAN PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION includes the major holdings of work by such renowned artists as Kate Breakey, Keith Carter, and Graciela Iturbide, and houses the largest archive of modern and contemporary Mexican photography in the United States. Connie Todd, Curator.



*Texas State University-San Marcos, founded 1899,
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The rising STAR of Texas

["Texas State" is the preferred second reference for Texas State University-San Marcos (not "TSU," which begs confusion with Texas Southern University and Tarleton State University), or, if an abbreviation is absolutely necessary, "TxSt" is acceptable.]

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