Southwest Georgia is peanuts, pecan, and cotton country. It's in the Black Belt, so-called either because the majority of the people are Negro, or because of the black earth. I've heard both reasons, and both are true.

Negroes outnumber whites more than 2 to 1 in Lee, Terrell, and Sumter Counties.

All political and economic power is firmly controlled by the minority of whites.

Before the Civil War, this was slave plantation country. Today, a lot of the land is still owned by the grandchildren of the slaveholders, and worked by the grandchildren of the slaves.

The special report published by the United States Civil Rights Commission in 1961, and entitled VOTING, deals at length with Lee County. The average Negro in Lee County has gone to school only 3.2 years, the average white, almost ten years. The average white person earns annually $1,571. The average Negro, $479 a year.

A Negro field hand often is paid only $15 a week during the crop picking, and as automatic pickers are replacing human labor, jobs are becoming scarce.

Reverend Charles Sherrod, the head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's Southwest Georgia Voter Registration Project told me that there were only two classes of people in S.W. Georgia - the owners, and the sharecroppers and day laborers. In other words, wealthy whites and poor Negroes. There used to be some poor whites, but most have migrated to the factories.
Georgia to work with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) voter-registration drive project. Reverend Charles Sherrod, the head of the project, drove me through Lee County and Terrell County.

He showed me piles of rubble that had once been churches. They had been burnt down by irate whites because Negroes were using them for voter registration meetings. He showed me the field where a Negro body turned up last summer—riddled with bullets and castrated.

In Lee County, Sherrod showed me the tree where several years ago a white mob had lynched five Negroes. That tree stands as a reminder to Negroes of the white man's power.

Sherrod introduced me to the leaders of the local voter registration movement in both counties. They showed us the bullet holes in their walls. White night riders had shot into their homes. I was overwhelmed and frightened. I asked one of them if the police had caught the people who shot into the house. He laughed. He had contacted the sheriff the first time his house was shot into. The sheriff accused him of shooting into his own house.

Since the shootings involved intimidation of people trying to register to vote,

Justice Department officials and F.B.I. agents investigated, but it seems that they only person they questioned was the leader himself. As yet, they have brought in no suspects.

As Sherrod turned the car off the black-top road. Most of what passes for "roads" in Lee are just ruts cut between the pecan and cotton fields.

Sherrod explained that most of the poorer people lived back here. This is where SNCC begins its work.

We were visiting Mrs. Annie Raines, one of the first people in Lee County to organize her friends to register.

Mrs. Raines is a good example of how the Negro people in the South are changing.
Nurse Dollie had been a nurse and midwife. Everybody calls her Mama Dollie. She helped most of the white women in the County give birth, and has nursed many white children. She was a "good nigger". She had gained the "love" of the whites. They would give her their old clothes, and give her small loans, and sell her goods on credit. But as soon as she first registered and began encouraging others to do likewise, she lost the whites' paternalistic affection. She lost her nursing job, her credit. She became ostracized by a large part of the Negro community, who had been warned by their bosses to stay away from her. Her home was attacked by night riders.

A former mayor of Dawson, in Terrell County, said, "This is a feudalistic system. But I don't know how or if it will be changed."

At first, it might appear that it would be impossible to start any kind of movement at all in Lee County. It is a large County in area, but its 2,000 whites and 4,000 Negroes live widely scattered. There are no urban centers.

Ever since slavery days there have been sporadic rebellions against the system, and there have been many individuals who from time to time have stood up against the white power structure.

One of the leaders, James Mays, said his father and brothers had tried to vote several years ago. They couldn't because whites carrying guns threatened to kill them. But it wasn't until the summer of 1962 that a coordinated, mass movement began.

The Negroes of Lee and Terrell County were inspired by the mass anti-segregation demonstrations in the nearby city of Albany. They adopted the methods used in the city to their own needs, and began a movement to improve the conditions of the schools, and to register to vote.

Here is Doctor W.G. Anderson, a physician, and Head of the Albany Movement, exemplifying the explosion of Negro feeling.
Our main job was to go from shack to shack and talk to people. We would talk about the importance of registering to vote. With the vote, Negroes for the first time since Reconstruction could have a voice in how their government was run. We told them about their rights under Federal law. About the fact that people, white and Negro, all over the country were supporting them. We invited them to the weekly mass meetings. We explained how Negroes were getting together in nearby Albany, and how conditions were getting better there.

Every Sunday all SNCC workers would go to the various churches in the counties and we worship as new people, and, if the minister was friendly, and invited us to talk, we spoke about a New South, and about voter registration.

In the past, police brutality, lynchings, and discrimination were suppressed by local authorities. Whenever there were incidents our job was to get the story to the national press, and to contact the Justice Department and F.B.I.

We also started literacy classes.

As a white, my main job, far from taking people to the registration polls, was to somehow break barriers that have existed for hundreds of years. Most Negroes reacted to me as they have been taught to react to all white men - with a subservient "yassuh boss".

We talked about anything - the weather, crops, local gossip, anything to gain confidence.

Sometimes I had a little transistor tape recorder with me. Some of the children got a kick out of it. While we were talking to the kids, the local Deputy Sheriff was parked outside the house. He arrested us later in the day.
It was hard for me to overcome those characteristics within myself that caused this reaction in others. I discovered that a lot of the traits that were particularly white, and I had to have a full understanding of these before I could be effective. Traits such as paternalism, or over-reacting and trying to "prove" that I wasn't like other white men. I had to overcome self-consciousness, I had to learn those traits which are basically human and universal, and give up many traits which I considered part of my individuality, but which only served to alienate myself from the people with whom I worked.

All SNCC workers in Southwest Georgia live in the homes of local residents. They have very little means of support outside of the food and shelter people give them. Sometimes, we received small amounts from the main office's aid fund in Atlanta. But in the rural areas spread apart that automobiles are absolutely necessary to the work. These cost money to operate. Many times during my experience in the South we had to decide between food for ourselves or gas for the cars, but gas always came first.

Sherrod assigned myself and John O'Neal, a graduate of Tallahassee, to work with the voter registration in Lee County. We lived with Mama Dollie.

During the period I was there, John and I helped pick crops, and helped Mama Dollie do the farm work in order to find help ends meet.

Very close feelings develop between SNCC workers and the people who support them, and with whom they work. Here is Prathia Hall, a field secretary in Terrell County, who had been away from Terrell for several months. She had gone home to Philadelphia for several months and was returning for a visit. She later came back to work in Terrell.

Of course, anybody who houses SNCC workers has to live in constant danger. All the houses that have taken workers in have been shot at by night riders. There were shot guns in every room at Mama Dollie's. That is in case...
One of the most active messiahs was a day-laborer, and a deacon at Sumter County. He convinced his congregation to open the church for voter registration meetings. When October arrived, he was coming home from fishing, and found his house burnt to the ground, and his two little girls frozen to death in the ditch. He had lost everything. When he told us about it, he said, "You there—stood with good fish and no-place to cook it.

His little girls told him that white men had done it. He and the girls were questioned by the local sheriff, by the agents from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, and from the F.B.I. They came away with the story that the two girls did it. Reverend Charles Sherrod—explained told the story at a mass meeting.

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*****SHERROD'S BURNING HOUSE STORY

Shortly after this happened, Porter was called one day and told that the sheriff told him he must and Sherrod would be arrested if they held another meeting in Sumter. Porter said it was just a matter of—so that we should be aware. He was standing for his rights and of course would not to the meeting.

SHERROD'S GRANDMOTHER STORY

When we went to work in Lee and Sumter, we received threatening phone calls. Our car was followed where ever we went. Some times by teenaged kids, sometimes by the sheriffs, sometimes by men with guns.

The first thing we did when we moved into a small town was to walk down the main street, in order to try to allay the white persons' fears that we were operating as all the papers said. The town had only one main street with high wooden sidewalks and an awning that stretched from one end of the street to the other, like the towns you see in cowboy movies. We walked down the street, and decided to get a coke from a gas station on the other side. There were three of us, [name], Jack Chatfield, a white worker, Chico Nebbitt, Negro, and myself.

As we walked across, we noticed that the group of men who inevitably hang around the Southern gas stations, and spend half their lives there, were coming toward us. One man came toward us, and tried to shove us, in order to provoke a fight. It later turned out that he was the mayor of the town, and several days later, he issued a warrant for our arrest, claiming that we trespassed on a corner of a field he owned, which is possible because he owned most of the fields in town.

Anyway, he came toward us and told us not to come to his station. We politely said all right, and turned to go back across the street, where we saw another two men staring at us. We simply walked toward them, looking down so as not to provoke an incident, and simply walked away from the direction from which we came. They shouted after us, cursing, "You cold S.O.B.'s."

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Trim Porter
Violence is a daily occurrence in the work. Fear, the hard, tight feeling in the pit of the stomach, became a part of life.

Where ever we went, we constantly harrassed by the police.

In Albany, I was picked up twice on suspicion of stealing the car I was driving. It takes several hours for the police to "prove" to their own satisfaction that the car has not been stolen, but in the meantime they let you sweat it out and ask you questions. About the next move the voter registration movement will make.

In Dawson, in Terrell County, there is a corner where a new stop sign had been put up, but the County obviously forgot to take the old one down, so there are two stop signs, one about five feet from the other. If a person working for the Movement doesn't stop twice, he's likely to be slapped in jail with a line.

One night, the home of Caroline Daniels, in Dawson, was shot into by whites. The knowledge was widespread that she was housing white SNCC workers. Jack was standing in the living room and got shot in the arm. He showed me the shirt that he was wearing, and the holes were just a fraction of an inch from his chest. Jack had just come to work in Terrell, in fact this was the first time he had ever been in the South. He had only been there forty five minutes in the South when it happened. The police were called to help, but listen to Jack describe their attitude when they drove him and another SNCC worker to the police station for questioning. He also said that the doctor who had been called in threatened to kill him if he didn't leave Terrell.

---JACK CHATFIELD STORY
Our project is the only one in the deep South that was.

even, I had no scruples in going there,

Throughout the South, Negroes engaged

in the Civil Rights Movement are chastized as Communists and in

Southwest Georgia this isn't necessary. All the press has to do is

indicate that whites and Negroes are living together. To the whites

with whom I came into contact, this was lewd, dirty, filthy. When

the Movement first moved into Terrell, all the local paper had to do was

publish a picture of a Negro worker standing beside a white female

worker. The next several days several churches were burnt down.

When Rev. Sherrod and two other SNCC workers first came to Southwest

Georgia, they intended to begin the voter registration project in Terrell County, but it's
called "Terrible Terrell" by local residents, and its reputation

of being one of the most oppressive

However, Terrell County Negro leaders were very cold to the Movement.

Most of them would not let SNCC (or as it is called, SNICK) use their

churches to hold voter registration training settings. Other leaders

spread rumours about SNCC people.

Sherrod and two other SNCC workers first came to Terrell County, but it's
called "Terrible Terrell" by local residents, and its reputation

of being one of the most oppressive

They had to see successes elsewhere in order to overcome their doubts and fears. So SNCC moved from rural Terrell to the relatively larger

city of Albany.

As a result of anti-segregation demonstrations

organized and carried out by Negro youth of Albany, working with

SNCC workers, the adult Negro community moved, and organized the Albany Movement, headed by

Dr. W.C. Anderson, a physician.

The Movement spread and residents organized

their own movements in Terrell and Lee Counties.

In Lee, a high school student, Charles Wingfield, had been

expelled for presenting to school officials several demands for

improvements in the schools, and for encouraging people to register
to vote. Lee County Negroes organized a boycott of the schools,

keeping their children home, and demanding that Wingfield be

reinstated and that his demands be met. In the midst of this

boycott, several residents invited SNCC workers into Lee County.
Voter registration and gain strength. A group of Lee County teen-agers formed a committee and went after school to ask people to register. Of course, we begged them with training sessions. Mama Dollie, and other elderly women, formed their own group.

Canvassing is hard, frustrating work. Many people are simply afraid to let you in. They won't listen. Their bosses have warned them not to. They would close their door in our faces, and hope that Mr. Charles, a term for any boss, wouldn't find out we came. But many would peer out of the cracks between the boards in their walls until we were gone.

Once the Voter Registration Movement gained strength in Lee and Terrell, county officials closed the registration offices all but one day each week, and they were open only during hours when most people worked.

Here are recordings of Lee County people telling us their feelings about the voter registration work.

But despite violence and isolation from their friends, the Lee County Movement has registered many voters. And registering to vote means facing that white registrar, it means going up to the Court House. It means daring to say that it is valid for you to be concerned about how your government is to be run. It means a first step toward Negro gains dignity and manhood. It is a symbol.

The Movement is also running Negro candidates for office for the first time since reconstruction. It has started literacy classes, and is beginning work on a plan whereby County Negroes can pool their meager financial resources.

Mass meetings are held in each county each week. Here the people of the counties get together, sing, and share their fears and victories, and learn about registering to vote.
This is a mass meeting in Terrell County.

It is in a tent on the same site where a church had stood. The Church was burned down last summer.

Remind the people of the counties are huddled around a small kerosene stove. They look nervously at the tent opening every time there's a noise outside. Twice the County Sheriff has broken up the meeting.

But they have faith that they shall overcome.

leading right from "We shall Overcome":

THEME

Next week: Roots of Discontent, etc.
Give credit to the Freedom Singers.