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SPECIAL REPORT: "Deprivation and Dissatisfaction
 in the Mississippi Delta"

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Some twenty thousand pounds of food and clothing had been issued in Ruleville, attracting people from around Sunflower County, and nearby Leflore and Tallahatchie Counties, resulting in nearly 300 registration attempts over a four day period. Sitting on the steps made damp by the cardboard patched ceiling of the old rotting house, watching them shuffle by, beaten down by oppression, my role in reporting the plight of delta Negroes facing a winter without food or money --a winter of starvation (and at least one baby has died of starvation)--became that of a recorder of conversation:

"You can make it pretty good, until last month, this month, and next month; cause by that time, you owe everybody."

"I can tell you and the world that I have caught hell as long back as I can remember."

"Ain't one of us in this room that's born an livin here in Mississippi all his life, thats kids known what it's like to have a glass of sweet milk and a couple of eggs in the morning. We ain't had nothin."

"I have been so hungry stayin at a white man's place, that when I did get somethin to eat, I had to eat it gradually."

"You know yourself, you ain't been a bit more satisfied than me."

"Ain't gonna say we ain't got to suffer some, but we been sufferin all our lives, so it ain't gonna make a bit of difference now."

"They from Doddsville, on Lake Lindseys place, where that man been killin' niggers all these years. Those folks been workin' all these months, and she ain't got a bit more to eat than me working everyday, in that mud and water--half of them neckid and barefooted."

"People as desperate there as those children I used to see on TV, they said send a package to."

"Was a time when Negroes farmed, they could get money from white folks, but now, white freezing them out now."

"Bad a shape as we in, there's heap of folks in worse."

"Nobody is doing no worse than the people on the north end of Leflore County--neckid, buck-barefoot, and starvin'."

"If this food keep on commin, an I get something to keep my kids a goin, I doan intend to chop no white man's cotton. I'll work on voter registration, not 'til the white man says 'well done'. You lookin' at a woman that's done some sufferin'."

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With commodities not being issued in Leflore and Tallahatchie Counties, except to those people receiving welfare aid (5,101 in Leflore, and 2,903 in Tallahatchie--there are approximately 15,000 Negroes in Tallahatchie County and 30,000 in Leflore County), hundreds of people crowded the little house in Ruleville where the food and clothing was being issued, each with his own tale of poverty and despair:

There was Deacon Hall, from North Leflore County, a man with 10 children, described as "barefoot, neckid, and hungry, with not much of nowhere to sleep" who had been working there for thirteen years. His current wage was \$2.00 a day. He worked from 6 a.m. until dark, (commonly known as "from kin 'til kain't").

The best usually paid on the plantation is thirty cents an hour, and these usually go to people who come from town to work. Deacon Hall made 30 bales of cotton, and received \$200 for his labor (he should have gotten, before expenses were deducted at the rate per pound for cotton, something over \$6,000.

Another lady on the same plantation, made 26 bales and received \$800.

On nearby Chapman's Plantation, they pay \$2.00 per day and \$2.00 per hundred.

On a plantation in Sunflower County, Mississippi, a lady reported that she had been getting forty dollars a month in social security, but that the plantation owner reported her wages as being higher than they actually were, and consequently, she stopped getting social security. On another Sunflower County plantation, a girl said that she would like to register, but the boss said that she could "go down if you want," but there would be "nothin' when you git back."

There is, on a plantation in Leflore County, just across the Sunflower County line, between Ruleville and Minter City, a 45 year-old mother of 20 children. Four of these children are living with her, helping her to sharecrop the land. In January of 1963, she attempted to register to vote.

Slightly over a month after her registration attempt, while out in the field chopping, and talking up voter registration, a Negro approached her and said: "Tell those people in Greenwood that I don't want no freedom. I got my damn freedom! I would have been chopping for Mr. _____ if it hadn't been for you. You was out there talking that damn stuff 'bout registering, and he fired me on account of you talking that mess."

She went home for lunch, and, shortly, the boss' wife came and told her "y'all needn't come back this evening, what's left, I'm gonna leave it for the people that owe me." The next morning a carload of "people from somewhere or another" came and chopped cotton.

A week later, the "boss' brother" came by and said, "I think they done you dirty, stopping you from chopping, when folks on the place need it. They do what they want to do."

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She went to the March on Washington, "an' came back with a pin." In September, she went to Dorchester Citizenship School in Georgia. After the Kennedy assassination, she "started citizenship class first Friday after he was buried."

Her husband was recently told by the plantation owner, "I don't blame Sally for trying to help herself, 'cause if she didn't do something for herself, no white man was going to do nothing for her."

In Ruleville, there is a forty year-old sharecropper and day laborer who attempted to register in June of 1963. In September, he was arrested by the night marshall for carrying an icepick and disturbing the peace. He was told by the marshall, "they wanted to beat you up last night, but I told them 'don't beat you' cause I knew you was a friend of mine."

He was tried by Mayor Dorrough of Ruleville (with no lawyer), and was sentenced to \$100.00 and 30 days on the county work farm. During the trial he was told by the Mayor, "Everybody 'round here says you're crazy, but you're not crazy. I think that the people got you on the wrong horse. You're a member of this a long time." The Mayor continued, "Well, I think when you get out of this, you'll be a man."

He retorted, "I'm a man now, but you think I'm a child."

While he was on the county farm, the owner of the plantation on which he worked told his wife that he "didn't appreciate him living on the place; you can live here if you want to, but not him."

Coming home from the County Farm, he went to see the plantation owner: "Mr. Sidney, I came here to know if you still want me to stay on the plantation. How much do I owe you?"

It turned out that he owed \$45, but he said, "You know I just git off the Farm, I need \$5." It was given to him.

Later, as he questioned the boss as to why he didn't go his bond, he was told, "gimme my house."

He replied, "I'd be crazy to put my children in the road."

To which he was told, "Get out of here. I don't want no argument."

When he asked the boss, "what you got against me?", he was told, "nothing, I just don't want you on my place."

"Right this morning," says this sharecropper, "my life is not worth a nickel in Sunflower County."

But, of course, there is no life that's worth the effort of living, if you are a black man in the Delta of Mississippi.