

[SUMMER 1964]

Bombings 13th and 14th in McComb, Mississippi

It is hard for someone who has not lived in McComb these past months and in the Negro community of that small town in the southwest corner of Mississippi to understand the reality behind the two bombings of September 20 . The following account is written to convey some of that reality.

The first bombing comes at 10:50. Most of the Negroes of McComb are in bed--but only some are sleeping. These days most Negro adults in McComb don't fall asleep until the wee hours of the morning. Then the blast. That sickening, anguishing sound that has been heard twelve previous times over the last three months--that sound that Negroes in McComb have come to know do well. And everyone in McComb hears the sound of the blast-- McComb is a small town and very, very quiet. At night the sound of the blast can be heard for miles. And so ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ tonight the blast ~~was~~ heard for the 13th time--and shortly later for the 14th time. ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Tonight the sound ~~xxxx~~ is ~~xxx~~ more anguishing--for the pain grows worse with each bombing. Every Negro in McComb instantly knows what that sound means. Add then the moments of torment that follow--whose house, who is dead? It's not mine. Then who? My neighbor, my friend--my mother, my brother, my son, or maybe COFO again. Who? And one's stomach aches with pain and the pain seeps up into the chest and the head and comes out of every paw. Who? Is someone dead? The fear and the suspense grows--the anguish becomes unbearable. People grab whatever clothing they can find and run out into the streets.

The pain increases with each bombing. The 13th takes place at 10:50. The bombers know no ~~xxxxxx~~ restraint--they don't even wait until the Negro community is all in bed. It doesn't matter to them that the cafes are still open and that there are Negroes in the street. They come anyway--the police are ~~x~~ their friends and they certainly need not fear apprehension. This is the 13th bombing, not to speak of 4 church burnings, and noone arrested. And this in a town of 15,000 where everyone knows everyone's business.

People quickly learn the news--it's Mama Quinn's house. It couldn't be worse. Everyone loves Mama Quinn. She owns a popular cafe. She is kind and good to everyone. But more than that, she is a towering figure of strength. She can't be intimidated. Three years ago she was one of the first to welcome Moses and lend him and the SNCC workers her support. Her cafe has always been open--despite the threats. And this summer, again she leads the community. She serves black and white, night after night. And the pressures increase. Threats. The police raid her place twice--the first time they plant a bottle of whiskey and

it costs her \$150. She hold meetings of the Citizens League, a newly formed group of Negro business people, banded together, meeting secretly to lend aid and comfort to the COFO effort. The meet twice a month to plan buying land for a community center. Mrs. Quinn wants to offer the land she has in the back of her house--and this despite the increased hazards that would bring into her life. Finally, they succeed in making Mama Quinn close her cafe--she gets the final warning. She would rather close than be forced to stop serving the COFO people.

And so it was Mama Quinn--and it couldn't be worse. It comes at 10:50. And two little children are hurt. Oh my god, they could have easily been killed--if they had not been in the rear of the house. The house is almost demolished. They weren't out to frighten tonight. ~~xxxx~~ Mama Quinn was to be killed. Line up mothers and fathers and shoot down their children Before their eyes.

How much can a human being take? And here comes the police. They know who did it--they might have planned it themselves. They have been after Mama Quinn for a long time. Her white landlord, when he told her she must close down if she didn't stop serving the COFO people, replied when Mama chose to close down: "Good, now I can go tell the Sheriff and Police Chief and you wouldn't be bombed."

Here comes the police. The same police who have beaten our fathers and raped our daughters-- and put our children in jail. Right now two little boys sit behind bars in the county jail, sentenced to a year for making "threatening and obscene phone calls to a white woman." And the phone rings in the Negro community night and day with threats not to associate with those COFO workers. Some come from the police themselves. And now the police stride into the Negro community. They wear helmets, carry clubs and shotguns. They will pretend to investigate. Actually they come to intimidate the victims and gather up whatever evidence lies around before the FBI can get to it. They come to arrest the people whose house has been bombed. They've done it before. The pattern repeats itself. A house is bombed, the victim is thrown in jail. Mr. Dillion is in jail--his house was bombed on August 28. The highway patrolman told his wife that she better stop cooperating with COFO or the next time the dynamite will be dropped in the middle of her house. The Sheriff makes a similar threat. Now the police are coming. They will probably arrest Mama Quinn. (Actually they arrest her daughter, a teacher in the Freedom School this summer, and the baby sitter.)

How much can a human being take?

And in the midst of the pain and anguish, comes the second thud. Its on the other side of town. Who now? My mother, father, sister, brother! God damn, how much blood do they want! They got the church--Society Hill--the movement church. Its doors were closed this summer, but it has always been the center of the movement in South McComb. All the Freedom School ~~kindergarten~~ kids belong to Society Hill. It's Bryant's church. The NAACP holds its meetings there. I spoke there this summer. COFO workers were there the past Sunday and the Sunday before. Next door lives Alma Jackson, the mother of eight children, who lived in Amite county and who, three months ago, was dragged out of her home by 10 armed men and taken to a field where she was beaten and cut up and left for half dead. Her children don't like McComb--they wish they were back home where their friends are. But mother has told them they can't go back. Mother lies in bed awake at night. She lives next door to the church. It was the only place she could find that she could afford. But she knows that one night they are going to bomb the place. Her life is never-ending fear. Is this America?

The Church is demolished. It was a terrible blast. The police are here, certain again to see that all clues are removed and destroyed.

And where is the federal government? But no, the local police must handle the situation; they are the upholders of the law. ~~xxxxxx~~ The federal government has no authority. And so the police stride in. The Negroes crowd in the street, brooding, anguishing. To the police this is a mob. So they tell the press: 3000 Negroes gather in the streets. Yet the entire ~~an~~ Negro population of McComb is just over 3,000. This doesn't matter. Cover up the real story. Paint a picture of rioting Negroes. Play on Northern fears. This is what the press will pick up. And so Mike Wallace calmly and objectively explains to morning national T.V. viewers that last night the Negroes of McComb reacted with violence--the rest--to two bombings follows but is not heard. And so the story of the murder of a community goes untold.