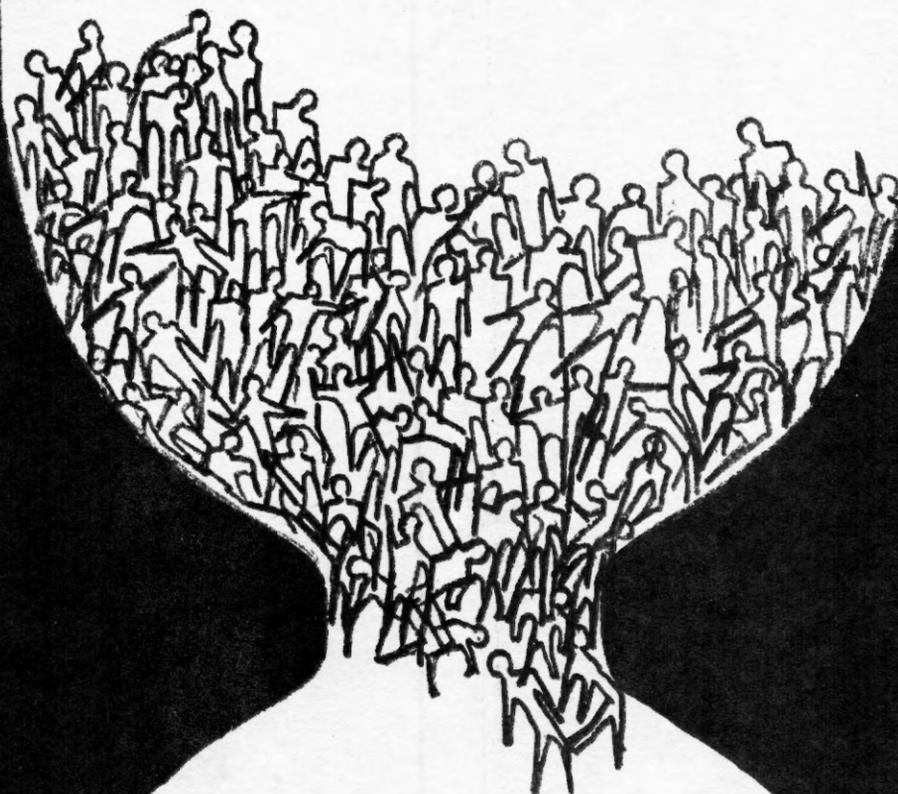


JUSTICE IN GRENADA MISSISSIPPI



EQUAL PROTECTION UNDER THE LAW

Prepared for the Fellowship of the Concerned in Mississippi
by the Southern Regional Council

TRAGEDY IN GRENADA

A Study in the Breakdown of Law Enforcement

Many scenes of tragedy in Southern communities faced with Negro protest have raised up single villains - "Bull" Connor, Jim Clark, Laurie Pritchett. Most have eventually faced up to the necessity for accommodation of Negro rights. Not so, Grenada, Mississippi.

Grenada, in the Summer of 1966, was not prepared to face the hard reality of unhappy local Negroes. Official Grenada responded to Negro demands with the familiar, "no, never." Law enforcement officers, faced with what they considered the "odious" job of protecting peaceful Negro demonstrators, simply abdicated their legal responsibilities; in confrontations between Negro protestors and white mobs, these officials resembled nothing so much as "bought" referees.

Each time such a confrontation occurred, there was a breakdown in law enforcement - a vacuum of power. Sometimes, other law enforcement agencies filled the vacuum. More often, dd it was filled by white mobs.

In the Spring of 1966, Grenada, a sleepy, North Central Mississippi town of some 8,000 inhabitants -- whites outnumbering Negroes by about 250 -- had no civil rights organization and had experienced not even the faintest manifestations of organized Negro unrest. Civil Rights Acts, Freedom Rides, sit-ins, protest, had not come to Grenada. The town remained segregated.

"Two sets of restrooms (numbered One and Two) had been built into the County Courthouse. Negroes had never been permitted library privileges. The police force, the city's swimming pool and the town's twelve white churches were all segregated. Even the U. S. Post Office in Grenada was entirely white-staffed." (1) Only 135 of the County's 4,300 eligible Negroes were registered to vote in June, 1962. Four years later, on June 14, 1966, only 700 Negroes were registered. (2)

JUNE 15
June 14, 1966 is the day that divides Grenada's history into "before" and "after." For on that hot, sunny ~~Tuesday~~ *WED.* the Meredith March came to town. About 175 marchers arrived at the city line; but as the group passed through the town it picked up considerable local support, until one Highway Patrolman, ordered to be on good behavior by an image-conscious

state, estimated that he saw "about a mile of niggers." (1)

The town had made some preparations for the arrival of the marchers. One Grenada official recalled: "We had several meetings among ourselves before the marchers came. We wanted to avoid trouble." (2)

City Manager John McEachin told a reporter who preceded the march: "All we want is to get these people through town and out of here. Good niggers don't want anything to do with this march. And there are more good niggers (here) than sorry niggers." (3)

The streets along which the march proceeded were relatively empty. There were no shouted obscenities, no cat-calls, no missile throwing. The population had been prepared for the march and warned to remain calm.

Policeman Jack Shipp told a couple of would-be trouble-makers: "If you want to boo, boo out in the woods." (4)

City Attorney Bradford Dye later described how word was spread to avoid incidents, with statements to this effect: "Roll with the punch." "The County itself is granting concessions to Negroes all over the place." "Let them demonstrate for a day and then the parade will be over - and things will return to normal." (5)

And so, the marchers swarmed into courthouse square, which was ringed by state and county lawmen. The surrounding crowds of whites remained silent, though sullen. Even when SCLC official, Robert Green, climbed up on the town statue of Jeff Davis, slapped the face of the Confederate hero, and referred to him as "this joker . . ." The whites made no public outcry, although that "desecration of our monument" became the Summer rallying cry of bitter, resentful whites. (6)

*NOT TRUE
(IMPOSSIBLE)*

This demonstration of civic self-discipline didn't mean that the townspeople were reconciled.

From a chair in the barber shop that day, one customer intoned: "They can pass all the laws they want, but niggers'll still have black faces. Where's this gonna end? I'll tell you. It's gonna end when we mow'em down, mow'em down." (7)

A merchant said: "I saw two of my niggers in there, an' they won't have no jobs tomorrow . . . they get in that march an' that's it. They'll be on relief tomorrow." (8)

A Sheriff's Deputy remarked the next day: "After they leave, everything will be the same again. The nigger in this town depends on the white man for his living." (1)

However, in the face of Negro demands and in the presence of national television and newspaper correspondents, city officials yielded gracefully. Prosecutor Dye met with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other Negro leaders. He agreed to desegregate the Courthouse washrooms. Six Negro teachers were added to the complement of voting registrars. Registration hours were extended from 5:00 pm to 9:00 pm. (2)

As the conference continued, a night march was organized from a nearby church to the town square. "When Dr. King emerged smiling to report that the town had 'completely capitulated' to Negro demands, the crowd went home." (3) Again, the white community remained silent.

"As the group of 300 marchers filed past the darkened homes of the white section, the only sound that rose through the dark-boughed shade trees was the steady scuffle of marching feet. The restraint on the part of the whites was overwhelming. Not one heckler emerged. Not one epithet was hurled. Not one "Nigger" shouted. But the silence was a dark, brooding, seething silence . . ." (4)

But for all of the underlying resentment, the public behavior of local law enforcement officers could scarcely be criticized. They were displaying, for all to see, the image of a "New Mississippi."

"At 8:00 am Wednesday, the Courthouse opened as promised and by the time the march left Grenada Thursday afternoon, some one thousand Negroes had been added to the voting rolls. At a press conference in front of March headquarters, Dr. King declared: 'We will not allow window dressing compliance that will get us out of town. We can't guarantee there won't be some suffering and sacrifice. I've never worked anywhere where Negroes haven't lost jobs. But I'm convinced Mississippi will never be the same.'" (5)

Prophetic words indeed when applied to Grenada.

Before the March was a day down the road, Grenada's true colors - the stars and bars - again fluttered from the War Memorial. Two days later, the Negro registrars disappeared - and the color line reappeared wherever Grenadans gathered. (6) And so, amid mounting tensions, the Movement returned to Grenada full force, "demanding impossibly much of a town

NOT TRUE

willing to yield impossibly little."(1) Hosea Williams of SCLC unfurled a 51 point bill of demands and pledged to make Grenada nothing less than an "open city," integrated everywhere from the Little League to the Old Folks' Home.(2)

Since the efforts of law enforcement officers were based on the assumption that their difficulties would disappear with the passing of the march, the news that SCLC was planning to conduct an ongoing campaign came as a severe blow. It was at this point that the quality of law enforcement began to deteriorate rapidly - not just from ill-will, but from a real inability to grasp the fundamental issues involved. UT

Said Sheriff Suggs Ingram: "They had it so easy during the March they thought they could come back and take over. We are not going to put up with what we have in the past, even if it takes force."(3)

In response to the initial demands of SCLC organizers, the city and county officials issued a joint manifesto, stating baldly: "There will be no concessions of any type or degree made to anyone whatsoever."(4)

Grenada wasn't budging. And the second act of the tragedy began.

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A detailing of the Summer's events might well begin with the Independence Day celebration held on the night of July 3 in an abandoned barn outside of town. In attendance, among a crowd of 150, were 8 SCLC staffers, 5 Negro and 3 white, who had been left behind by Dr. King after the March departed. About 10:00 pm, Sheriff Ingram and a deputy appeared. The 3 SCLC whites were arrested and the next day, most of the Negro staffers were rounded up on various charges of being tramps and disturbing the peace.(5)

IN ACCURATE

On July 7, 41 Negroes and 2 whites planned a march on the jail to protest the earlier arrests. (According to some reports, they had just been denied entry to a theater.)(6) They were refused a march permit and then staged a sitdown strike. All 43 were arrested.(7)

Open police brutality on a large scale first occurred on July 10. A group of about 50 Negroes arrived at the Jail for the stated purpose of visiting those already arrested.(8) They were informed that they couldn't visit and were ordered to disperse. When they failed to do so immediately, they were told

that they were under arrest. The group crossed the street and mingled with a crowd of about 150 Negroes who had been watching the demonstration. At this point, approximately 25 State Highway Patrolmen, who had been kept out of sight around the corner, charged the crowd swinging billies and gun butts. The bystanders were still being beaten by the Highway Patrolmen when County policemen were ordered to disperse a nearby crowd of noisy whites. No whites were struck.(1)

From this point on, official hatred and violence were out in the open. There was no longer even a pretense of equal protection under the laws.

The situation grew increasingly tense. White fears and hatreds were further aroused by SCLC's call for a boycott or "black-out" of white-owned downtown stores and by continued concerted attempts to test desegregation in public facilities.(2)

On Wednesday, July 13, the second day of boycott picketing, 35 picketers were arrested after City Attorney Dye ordered police to "disperse these people any way you can."(3)

The next day, about 200 marchers approached the town square, planning to hold a demonstration in front of the War Memorial. But the Confederate statue was guarded by 8 Negroes - identified by Constable Grady Carroll as prisoners serving life sentences.(4) They were ordered to shove back anyone who came near the statue. The marchers retreated rather than place the Negro prisoners in the position of having to attack other Negroes. Sheriff Suggs Ingram seemed amused by the confrontation of black vs. black.(5)

The struggle grew in intensity. As the boycott became increasingly effective, more picketers were arrested.(6) The Federal Court ordered County officials to provide adequate protection for the demonstrators.(7) The Justice Department sent in Federal Voting Registrars.(8) There were continuous marches and counter-marches, and only the presence of over 100 state Highway Patrolmen prevented massive violence.(9) Three Negroes leaving a theater were brutally beaten because one of them was so light-skinned he appeared to be white.(10) Mass arrests took place at a Negro dance in Tie Plant, a nearby community.(11)

The situation had become so serious, and complete loss of control by responsible community leaders so imminent, that "County officials requested a conference with Movement leaders. They asked for a temporary halt to demonstrations. Leon Hall,

a 19 year old SCLC Project Leader, answered with a list of 17 urgent demands, including the release of the 57 Tie Plant party-goers. Declared one outraged white official: "That settles it. We just wanted you to know that we can't protect you. You are on your own." (1) *inaccurate*

Here was an official abdication of responsibility for law enforcement by the power structure. The lid was off. The pot was ready to boil over. And it did.

On August 8, the Police and Highway Patrolmen were issued tear gas and were quick to use it. That evening, "some 75 - 85 City, County and State officers" (2) broke up a Negro voter registration rally by firing about 20 cannisters of tear gas (3) into a crowd of 200 people. City Attorney Bradford Dye explained that the crowd had been ordered to clear the street, "which they did, partially. Then they were asked to open it more. They didn't. Tear gas was used to disperse them." (4) Officers then chased bystanders ten blocks into the heart of the Negro district, clubbing some down on their own front lawns. (5) *inaccurate (own side)*

The next night, violence became general. As demonstrators neared the town square for a planned rally, Sheriff Suggs Ingram told a reporter: "Now you're going to see a show." (6)

A mob of 250 whites waited by the Confederate monument in the square. As the demonstrators approached, the mob "threw bottles, bricks, steel pipes and firecrackers at the 300 Negroes. The attack sent demonstrators fleeing from the town square with whites in pursuit. At one point, over 100 state and local officers stepped in between the whites and the demonstrators, turned their backs to the white crowd, and rested their guns on their hips with the gun barrels pointed over the heads of the Negroes. Whites continued hurling missiles over the heads of the officers." (7)

"Many of the officers, including Sheriff Ingram, laughed as the missiles struck the Negroes, then issued angry warnings after 2 Negroes hurled missiles back at the whites!" (8)

One of the demonstrators was taken to the hospital and at least a dozen others were injured. (9)

When asked the next day why he hadn't stopped the mob, Ingram responded: "Police couldn't have stopped it without using violence." He told how, a few minutes before the attack, he had asked several members of the mob to back away from the demonstrators. "I asked'em to do me a favor. Told'em I'd 'preciate it." (10)

The events of that night made it clear that there was no effective law enforcement in Grenada. In response to the obvious power vacuum, Governor Johnson sent in his riot control expert, Giles Crisler. (1)

On Wednesday evening, August 10, another demonstration was held, this time with rather different results. The evening began with a mob of some 300 whites firing chiselled bolts from sling shots and throwing cherry bombs and other firecrackers at 40 demonstrators, mostly teenagers, who had gathered in the square. Then came the difference. Crisler, backed by 250 officers, mostly State Troopers and Game and Fish Commission Officers, cleared the mob from the square at gunpoint, after they refused to heed warnings about throwing rocks. (2) *over 100*

Shouts of "nigger lovers" and "traitors" came from the mob as troopers pressed them down streets leading from the square. "I never thought I'd live to see the day," (3) shouted one man.

Sheriff Ingram remained in the background as State officials took over.

Once it had been demonstrated that there was a force in Grenada bigger than the mob, a certain degree of peace, or at least truce, settled over the town. And that should have been the end of Grenada's chapter in the annals of violent resistance to civil rights activities, but it was not. There was yet a third act. *Not true State only used to prevent publicity Violence continued unabated*

On August 26, Federal Judge Claude Clayton, on petition of the Justice Department, ordered Grenada's schools desegregated. (4) School registration had been set for September 2, but because of the complexities involved in the processing of "freedom of choice" forms, it was postponed until September 12. (5)

During the more than three weeks which elapsed between the issuance of the court order and the opening of school, local law enforcement officials, despite their Summer experiences, made no plans for special precautions or protection for the Negro students. (6) According to testimony later given before Judge Clayton, they assumed that the State Highway Patrol would be available for special help, although State law forbids the Highway Patrol to operate in municipalities without the express request of local officials or a formal order from the Governor. (7) *Not true they did make plans.*

As a result, when School Desegregation Day came, the only law enforcement agencies available to maintain order were the Sheriff and his deputies and the City Police Department, both of which agencies had long since demonstrated their unwillingness and inability to keep order in the community.(1)

Thus, the tragic events of September 12-13 were, in a way, inevitable.

300 of the 1,387 eligible Negro children registered for admission to the formerly all-white Lizzie Horne Elementary School and John Rundle High School.(2)

On the evening of September 11, separate columns of Negro and white demonstrators marched around the Courthouse Square, side by side.

About 275 Negroes shouted, "John Rundle, John Rundle High School," in answer to a shout of "Where are we going to school tomorrow?"(3)

While there was no large scale violence that evening, it was obvious that feelings among both communities were running very high. Still, city officials made no special arrangements.

On the first morning of school, small roving bands of whites, armed with axe handles, lead pipes and chains, attacked many of the 150 Negro children who appeared, lashing out at boys and girls alike. The gangs were directed to their victims by walkie-talkies or gun shot signals, from pick-up trucks which cruised the streets near the school complex.(4)

A few items will, perhaps, catch the flavor of the day.

A gang of whites trampled Richard Sigh, 12, in the dust, breaking a leg.(5)

One group of girls, including 14 year old Emerald Cunningham, were on their way to school when they saw a crowd of whites approaching. Most of the girls fled, but Emerald was caught by the mob. One man pointed a gun at her head and pushed her into a front yard. Then the mob began to beat her with fists, pipes and chains. When Emerald tried to leave, the man with the gun said, "Nigger, you move I shoot your brain out." Finally a white man pulled her up and said: "Get away and don't come back."

Why didn't she flee with the rest of the girls? Emerald explained: "I had polio and couldn't run."(6)

One twelve year old boy, attempting to escape, was forced to run a block-long gauntlet of whites who flailed him with chains. He emerged with a bleeding face and torn clothes.(1)

These, of course, are only a few of the incidents. In all, 33 Negroes and three white newsmen were assaulted that day.(2)

Perhaps the most significant fact is that almost all of these attacks and beatings took place within view of local law enforcement officials.(3)

"While Negro youngsters were thrown to the ground, kicked and beaten, Grenada Policemen stood by and grinned.

"These niggers," explained Constable Grady Carroll, "is keeping the law enforcement officers from doing their duty."(4)

NAACP Attorney Henry Aaronson said that he heard white men make threatening remarks when he arrived at the school grounds. Constable Carroll and Police Captain Turner were nearby, so he asked them for protection. *New Day*

Aaronson testified: "Carroll looked at the toughs and nodded at me. It was a very distinct nod. Immediately on nodding, the group charged me. I ran to Carroll and said, 'Grady, Grady, help me.' He said, 'You don't belong here.' Then the group got me. They hit me on the head and I don't know where else. They beat me to the ground. And I was screaming to Grady for help. I saw Grady's shoes the whole time, while Grady and Turner stood there."

When the ordeal was over, Aaronson reported that Carroll asked him: "What the hell are you doing here causing all this trouble." (5)

A Negro woman stated that she opened her car door to let broken glass fall out of her auto after a white crowd attacked, and Carroll, who had been standing by all the time, said: "Don't you get your . . . out of there. If you do, we'll kill you."(6)

Robert Gordon, a reporter for UPI, tried to escape from the mob by running across the school grounds, but was ordered off the premises by a County Policeman. Then the mob caught Gordon again and knocked him to the street. Finally, two policemen came up and rescued him. One of the policemen told the mob: "OK, boys, he's had enough."(7)

Charles Alexander, 17, was struck with a pistol outside the high school. The assailant then pointed the gun at him. When Alexander pointed the man out to a policeman who was patrolling the sidewalk, he was rebuffed. "I'm busy now," said the policeman.(1)

Instances of police indifference to, and apparent approval of, the brutalities of the day would fill many pages. The police attitude is best summed up by Constable Carroll's explanation concerning the attacks on reporters. "Some of the newsmen needed a cleaning. If they tell a lie, they need a whopping . . ." From whom? "From any body who wants to give it to them," Carroll said.(2)

This day's events did not mark the end of the violence. Although Governor Johnson ordered the State Highway Patrol into the area on Monday night, they did not move into the school area on Tuesday morning until asked to do so by local police.(3) By the time they went into action, many car windows had been smashed and at least four more children beaten.(4)

While the presence of the State law enforcement officers put an end to attacks on women and children, it did not have a beneficial effect on the mood of the white community.

Several hundred whites, shouting defiance of state and federal authority, held a furious session Monday night in the City Hall Auditorium to demand that the patrol be withdrawn. "If you get that State Highway Patrol out of here, there won't be a nigger left in Grenada," cried one man.(5)

On Tuesday night, a group of Negro demonstrators were attacked by a white mob in the town square. The large contingent of State officers stepped between the groups only after the white attack had taken place.(6)

This was the last serious incident of violence. Order was finally brought to Grenada by the presence of the State Highway Patrol, 13 FBI arrests,(7) and a Federal Court order to local officials, so sternly worded by Judge Clayton that one official reported: "When the judge got through, you thought you could crawl through the eye of a needle."(8)

None of these events seems to have brought any basic change to Grenada. Sheriff Suggs Ingram still occupies the throne. Constable Grady Carroll, who received a four month sentence for Contempt of Court, will probably soon be back at the old stand, if he is not already there. The City Council has issued yet

another statement in favor of "law and order." (1) A white minister reports that racial lines are so tightly drawn that: "If you so much as suggest talking to the colored leadership, you're labelled a 'nigger lover' and a 'race mixer.'" (2)

These last items serve to illustrate that the law enforcement process can fail again in Grenada. No changes have been made. No lessons have been learned. As late as the last week in October, over 275 young Negro demonstrators and picketers were arrested, some of them sent to the state prison at Parchman, because all of the jails in the area were full to overflowing. (3)

The only small ray of hope for the future came from the children themselves. One the afternoon of that terrible first day of school, many of the Negro children had gathered in the Auditorium waiting for the mob to disperse somewhat. Sheriff Ingram came and told the children that they could leave and would be given a police escort home. He advised them to leave by a rear door but the youngsters replied:

"No Sir, we're going out the front door like white folks." (4)

They did.

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FOOTNOTES

The footnotes listed below are intended to provide documentation for the facts stated in the article. While some passages are direct quotations from the sources given, this is not true in all cases.

PAGE 1

1. Andrew Jaffe, "Grenada" in New South, Fall, 1966.
2. Figures from the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council.

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1. Paul Good, "The Meredith March," New South, Summer, 1966.
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4. Newsweek, June 27, 1966
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3. Associated Press Dispatch July 13, 1966
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8. UPI Dispatch in the Delta Democrat-Times, July 11, 1966

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11. Jaffee, *op. cit.*

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2. L.A. Times, 8-11-66
3. *ibid.*
4. Washington Post, 9-14-66
5. Jackson Democrat-News, 9-12-66
6. Jaffee, *op. cit.*
7. AP dispatch, 9-13-66

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2. Time Magazine, 9-23-66
3. Jackson Democrat-News, 9-12
4. *ibid.* 9-13-66
5. Time Magazine, 9-23-66
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3. *ibid.*, & NY Times, 9-16-66
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5. Raleigh News-Observer, 9-17
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2. N.Y. Times, 9-19-66
3. Jaffee, *op. cit.*
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7. Miami Herald, 9-19-66
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1. NY Times, 9-15-66
2. Jaffee, op. cit.
3. NY Times, 10-28-66
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