

# "With Our Minds Set on Freedom"

## INTRODUCTION AND EDITORIAL COMMENTS

DONA RICHARDS

SOME OF US have been interested in collecting writings by people from Mississippi, which would reflect their thinking about the things which are going on about them. Many people are now writing about Mississippi and the Movement there, but few are from Mississippi. It seems that we libertarians, intellectuals and political activists have decided that the people who are most intimately involved (in this case, the disenfranchised Negroes of the South), cannot tell their own story, cannot correctly interpret their problems and suffering, cannot "make sense" of the Movement that is going on about and within them (the avowed purpose of which is to make *their* lives livable, not ours).

What is true is that "ordinary" people, that is, people with no special training, do not write. They simply do not have the chance; they do not have the chance in the sense that they do not connect up with society in the way that one must in order to write, or to have things published once they have been written. What is also true is that we limit the circle of those who write, and those who speak, by somehow taking it upon ourselves to specify the qualifications of a "writer" or an "intelligent being." We say how they must write and what words they must use when they speak; that is, if we are to allow them to be heard. The result is, of course, that most people are kept out of that small circle, not because those inside it are, in fact, "special," but because society, including its so-called critics, say that they are.

What I am hoping is that the presentation of these writings will help to communicate and spread some of the very new ideas which have grown out of the work in Mississippi and other similar experi-

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*Dona Richards is one of the talented young leaders of the Movement in the South. She collected and organized this anthology of written material from Mississippi.*



The cast of the Free Southern Theater takes a bow after performance of *"In White America."*

ences. We are beginning to develop an entirely new way of looking at people, organizations and organizing. Instead of members of the Freedom Democratic Party getting experts (politicians) to do their "politicking" for them, they do their own "politicking" in their own way (and the country begins to be reborn in the process).

What some of us are beginning to find is that we are not interested in getting new kinds of people (the Mrs. Hamers) into the old slots of authority and decision-making, but in giving these new people a chance to necessarily create new forms, within which they can operate best. The forms will not be new in the sense that Marx was new or in the sense that the socialism of the "left" is new, but they will be new in the sense that the minds that conceive them will be different minds. The painful part of this process will be that we who have always understood will perhaps not be able to understand at first, and those that we have always taught will have to begin to teach us. So that we will have to first learn how to "listen" to them and how to read what they have written. (This is only the logical extension of any critique of the present society.)

What follows here is an attempt to let the people of Mississippi do their own talking in their own way. I have often found "their own way" to be a very new and beautiful kind of expression that we "of the universities" have no access to. Sometimes it is painful, but everything that has been written here leaves the taste of truth.

All of the writings are brief. The subject in each case is "the Movement," but not always in its narrowly defined political sense. Sometimes people speak of the problems which are very sharp and real to those of us who are immersed in "the Movement"—the problems which are somehow seldom touched on by the Movement's many "analysts."

I have used some of the writings as starting points to state a few of the problems which are, at this point, peculiar to "the organizer." What is offered here should not be construed as the "prevailing opinion" within the Movement, rather it represents the results of some of the exploring and experimenting that has been going on as a result of the Mississippi Experience and that of other "hard core" areas.

### *EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE*

As far back as I can remember I've been told that in America everything is possible, that there is nothing that can't be done. I've been told that the thing you do is go to school, get all you can out of

school, go to college get good grades so that you can get a good job and that by getting a good job you can have a good home, and a new car, and when you get these things you will be complete. Your problems are over, you go about for awhile and then it comes upon you. Your problems are greater! Your thoughts are more confused. Your heart is empty. You find that there is nothing to live for. What do you do? What can you do?

The weak: Keep on pretending they have no problems, that they enjoy selecting their new car, that they enjoy talking about their office day and what happened on the freeway on their way home.

The strong: They change their surroundings, their friends, their customs and even their hearts and souls.

• I just hope that I will be strong; that I will not just conform—that I will be able to stand up and not only face but change my problems. To be able to do what I believe and think is right, not only for humanity, but truly myself.

THELMA HILL

*17-year-old high school student  
Jackson, Mississippi*

## HOW

*How* I got into the Movement is a question that has been asked many times by northerners. I can best answer this by saying I was like most other Americans, trying to find myself. And it just so happened that I was able to do it in the Movement.

Many people that are in the civil rights struggle are not in the "Movement," neither have they found themselves. The reason for this is because they are working with obsolete theories which society has set up, and their validity has never been questioned.

*How* the revolution is coming about is a frightening thing to people in the civil rights struggle as well as those that disapprove of the struggle. But, to those that are in the "Movement," they understand. Reasons for the frustration lie within their interpretation of "revolution," and not being able to detect it when they see it. Many of them see a revolution in the Deep South as a complete turnover in the government, in which Negroes can go to white schools and have their right to vote. When you can get a few Negroes who never had reason to think in terms of politics to get together and discuss their problems and walk in protest against injustice, the revolution is already going on!

This is why so many people are not in the Movement. The Move-

ment is in the revolution and it is ahead of most of the people including some people in the civil rights struggle. Most of all, the major revolution will come when people realize they are not free in the north as well as the south.

*How* Congress reacts in regards to certain legislation as the civil rights bill that was passed fills many hearts with joy. This could be because people never realize where the bill came from and the many things it neglects because of vagueness. Instead of this we should draw up our own bill and legislative acts and give it to Congress, and demand the execution of those already existing laws.

*How* we are accepted is something we should think of more. Evidence such as *vague* bills passed by Congress, statements by Lyndon Johnson, saying that demonstrations were disturbing the sleep of his two daughters, and Katzenbach's not considering that Negroes beaten by state, county and local officials and the killing of a white minister who believes in equality, is a breakdown in law and order, proves that America is not ready to accept us.

People in the civil rights movement are guilty of not accepting. They are not ready to accept many of the people they are working with because they will set up a false structure to attempt to deal with the problem. Also the decisions are mostly made by them for they believe that the people are incompetent as far as making decisions that govern their own lives.

#### HOLLIS WATKINS

*Hollis Watkins is now age 23. When only 19 he and a few others began voter registration work in McComb and Hattiesburg. He laid the groundwork for what later erupted into the mammoth Summer Project. At that time there were no T.V. cameras or publicity and the rest of the country did not watch as he and other Mississippians spent 55 days, forgotten, in the now infamous Parchman State prison. Hollis was born and raised 12 miles outside of Boguechitto, in Southwest Miss.*

We have begun to realize (slowly) that in order to question this society, we have to also question the value of their concept of education.

#### WE HAVE TEACHERS

We have teachers  
you don't know very well  
Shh . . . can you keep a secret? . . . don't tell.  
The teachers I refer to can read, write, and spell.

But you just take note:  
They are too stupid to register and vote.

HENRY REAVES

*Henry Reaves, Jr., Benton County, Mississippi, 10 years old*

Which has led us to see that we must start over again, building new things that belong to different people in a different way—and so we began forming our own schools to suit our own needs.

I want Freedom School to keep on.

I like everything about Freedom School.

I like art.

I like Freedom School.

I don't like to get up in the morning  
to come to Freedom School.

I like for Helen to read stories in Freedom School.

I like my teacher in Freedom School.

I like to sing Freedom Songs.

DENISE LEDBETTER, 10 years old

### A STORY

Once upon a time there was a little colored girl named Cindilillia. She worked for a white woman. One night they were having a Ku Klux Klan Ball. Cindilillia couldn't go. Then the door bell rang. It was Cindilillia's fairy godfather. It was Bobby Kennedy with two magic wands. One was the Constitution of the United States; the other was the Civil Rights Bill. He waved them and she was at the Ball. She was supposed to be home at twelve o'clock, but she was having such a good time that she forgot what time it was. The clock struck twelve. Cindilillia was standing in rags with brown skin. *And this story will be continued next week.*

JANICE CARSTAFHNUR

*Janice Carstafhnur is a McComb, Mississippi, high school student.*

### THE BASIS OF MY ARGUMENT

I was born in Anniston, Alabama, just another one-horse, whitefolks town. But where I was born hasn't really made that much of a difference with me. I know that many of you will croon "poor little black girl from Alabama," but if you really want to know, I never considered myself poor. Physically I've been poorer than most of you. I've had from nothing to eat to hard dry corn. I've lived like primitive

man off nature. I've lived in a house with more holes than boards. I've lived through floods and storms, I've watched my mother work her strength away with still nothing to show. I've worked on several jobs. I've been a dump hawk. I've spent a lot of time in churches and I've believed in Santa Claus and I've believed in America.

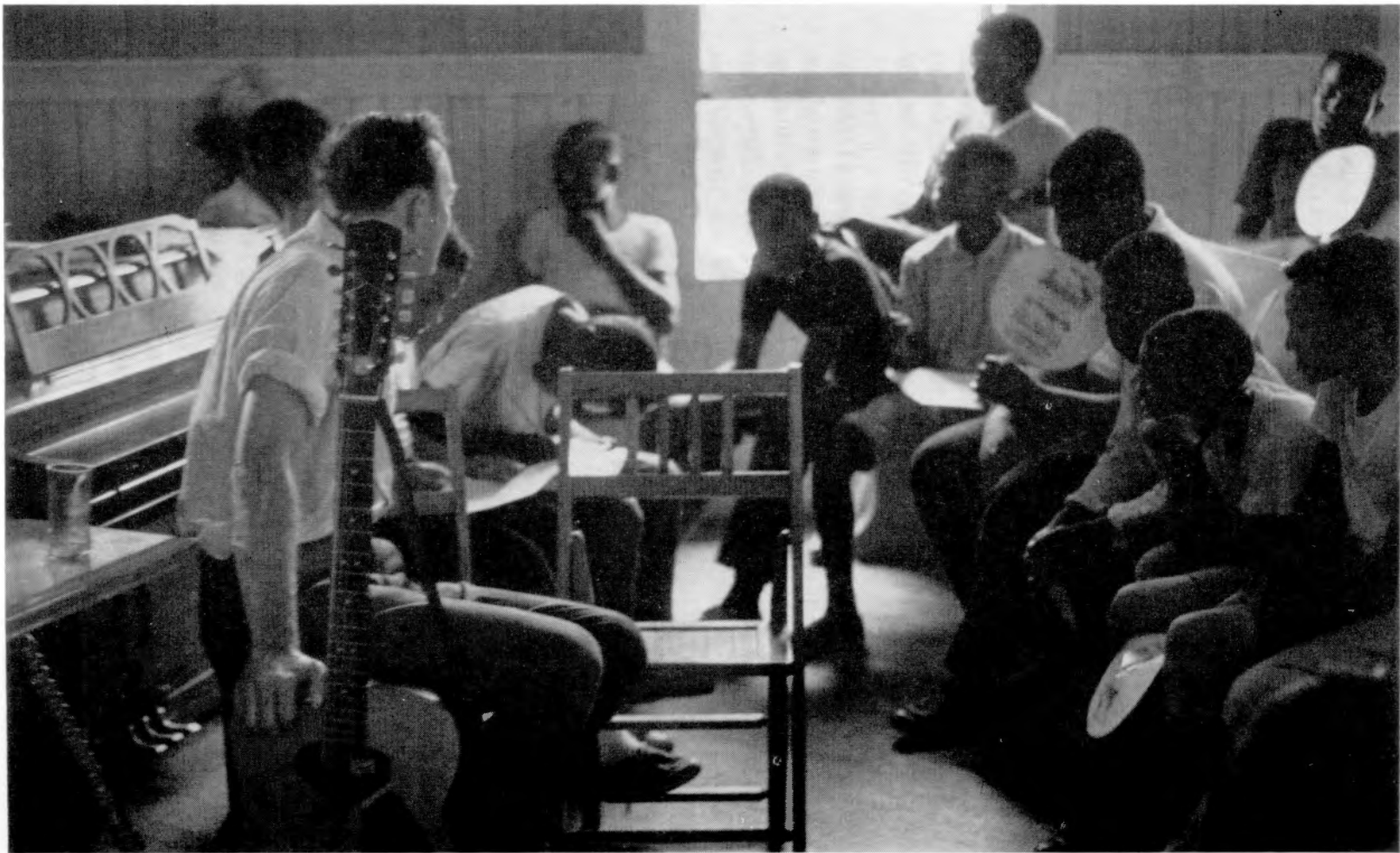
But even though I've been through all of this, I'm mentally rich. No. I'm nobody's intellectual. But I'm rich because I've stored all these experiences up and I refer often to them. Whatever I say stems out of these things. For it was at this time that the tone of my life was shaped. Sure I know that we are supposed to be able to change here in America, but to be true the imprint can never be removed; I can never change for I can never forget.

*The Movement:* During the period of my life when I lived in the gullies of the world I knew who I was. I knew that I was human. I loved mankind everywhere. Everybody in our community got along. The man who sold liquor next door was human. Nobody looked at him funny. The prostitutes, the old folks, and the young—everybody was still human. But once I moved out of the slum, things began to change. People started deciding who were dogs and who were human. Finally everybody was pretending to be that which they weren't. Now this was bad. I couldn't cope with that. I had to be true. That is, I didn't refrain from doing something just because the neighbors would talk. Now the Movement, to me, was supposed to be composed of people who had to be true. For until I met the movement physically, I was mentally dying. I couldn't survive without finding others like me. The Movement was my religion, my salvation. It gave me hope. It means a change to the purest form of nature where all is equal, where everything has its function and no function is greater than the other.

*What we are fighting for:* To be true, most of us don't know what we are fighting for. We get by by saying "Freedom," "the right to public accommodations," "better laws," or "the right to vote." But even after all of these things our thirst will not be quenched. What we really want is for the world to be our own way. The United States wants Vietnam to be capitalist, colleges want students to be intellectuals, the south wants people to be a certain way. Each of us is only a small part of the whole and the problem arises when we, the small part, want to make the whole world our way.

*The state of the leaders:* I have already said what the Movement was supposed to be to me. It is, in fact, not completely that. People who are leaders in the Movement were once the "innocent souls"





Folksinger Pete Seeger visits a Freedom School.



who didn't believe in the disparity of functions, but believed that every function was important. But they became "backsliders"; that is, they made the mistake of believing that they could *think for the people*.

*Gwen Gillon, age 19, began working with the Movement as a part of the Tougaloo Work-Study project, in the fall of 1963. She has been in Mississippi ever since.*

GWEN GILLON

### AN ESSAY

Today our headlines read "Nine Enter Pleas in Bombing Case. All suspended terms; Reprimands."

Now here's what I want everybody who reads this article to do; compare cases—then think, and see if your conclusion will be the same as mine.

Two teenage boys were sentenced to a year in jail and \$1,000 fine for making obscene phone calls. Nine men who were arrested for bombing churches, stores and homes were given suspended sentences, probation and a stern admonition to mend their ways. Now, let's look at the case of the teen age Negro boys, and ask yourself this question; why weren't they given probation and a stern admonition to mend their ways. I can see a 14-year-old boy mending his ways much more easily than a grown-up man who has already been taught to hate and destroy anything that belongs to a Negro. If these phone calls wouldn't have been received by a white woman their sentences wouldn't have been so severe.

We've had two or three weeks of peace. Now we can resume our night watch. The white man knows that he will get a suspended term for bombing—so why stop? If they would have been given four or five years, the next church, store and home destroyer would think before pitching his bomb or setting his dynamite.

It was stated in the Enterprise Journal (newspaper) that these men were neither guilty nor innocent. They weren't guilty because their act of violence only jeopardized and destroyed the property of Negroes. They were innocent from the beginning because they were white. It was also stated that these men were given a lecturing by the Judge. Don't you think that a lecture would have been more fitting for someone much younger, who wasn't arrested because of wanting to destroy or hurt, but was having innocent fun. I've always heard that you can't teach old dogs new tricks. These men are too

old for lectures, they need punishment and it's left up to us to see that they get just that.

Now, in conclusion I would like to say, the only thing to do is to pay them off in kind and see if the headlines would read the same "nine Negroes enter pleas in bombing case. All given suspended terms."

CAROL HUGHES, *high school student in McComb, Mississippi.*

### "AND I WAS NOT AFRAID"

This is the story of a Negro lady and her six-year-old daughter, Jessie. I tried to enroll her in a white segregation school in the state of Mississippi (County of Pike, town, Summit,) where the so-called good white people use signs with "colored" and "white" on all service station doors and cafe doors.

After I went to the school (Summit Elementary School) the principal and the teacher told me that I had to go and see R. S. Simpson of the Pike County School Board two blocks from the school. Town Marshall Woody Seal met me down the block and escorted me up to the school and when I got there the Sheriff and two FBI men were waiting, but they didn't say not a word to me. Then we went to Mr. Simpson's office. He spoke in a terrible way of speaking. I spoke back to him. He then said what can I do for you. I told him what he could do for me, and that was to transfer my daughter from Charles Taggart School to Summit Elementary School. He then asked me why I wanted my child to go to a white school? I told him because she would get an equal education and that she had to pass by the white school to get to the Negro school. He then said if I were you I would take her back to the Negro school where she went last year because she probably won't get to go to school at all this year. And in my own mind I knew why he was telling me that so that I could just forget the whole thing. Then he asked me what my husband's name was, where he worked, and where we lived; if we owned our own home or rent it, and who we rent from? As I was talking he was taking notes on everything I said. Then he said to me: "It will be two weeks before I can let you know if Jessie can go to that school." At one o'clock in the afternoon on that same day four KKK men came to where my husband was working and questioned him about me. That same day the man he was working for fired him and told him to go to Summit and have a talk with Woody Seal. He tried to make my husband say that he knew I was going to that

school before I went there and he did not make my husband say that he knew.

On September 8th, 1964, Woody Seal, the Marshall, stopped him in Summit on his way home from work and had him to get out of his car and get in Seal's car. Seal brought him on home and had him to get in the window of our house and get all his clothes and then took him back to Summit and he got out of Woody Seal's car and got in his. Four white men followed him from there to his mother's, four miles from Summit. After that my landlord (who is a Negro man) put me out and said to me that I had to leave his house because I wasn't doing anything but making trouble. Then I had to stay away from my kids for 4 months and a half until I found somewhere else to live. I was threatened by some white people. They told me to be out of Mississippi by Saturday of that same week or else anywhere they would see me they were going to kill me. And that same week a carload of white men passed through every night all night of that week until 4 o'clock in the morning. And I saw everything that passed and was not afraid.

ERNESTINE BISHOP, *Summit, Mississippi.*

### TUESDAY, MARCH 2, 1965

Left Freedom House at 1:30. Arrived in back of courthouse about 2:15 then began to march single file to the front of court house. Many people were around. Heard one man comment: those poor kids need to be in school getting their education. Continued to march to front of court house. When we got there we marched single file around so as not to block the sidewalk. No one said a word. People white and colored were looking on. After we had marched around about seven times Sheriff Warren came out and we stopped and faced him. He said if there was anyone who wanted to come in and register may do so and if there were other people who wanted to leave but felt that someone was forcing them to stay may leave also and that they (the police) would deal with them who forced others to stay. And if we didn't leave all of us were under arrest. He told us to march and go get on the bus which was in the back of the courthouse and there that's where all the hell begun. They tried to takt our signs but we dropped them before they had a chance to take them. When they got to Mrs. Quinn she demanded to know where we were being taken. For an answer Sheriff Warren tried to push her on the bus then some more police assisted him. She got on the bus but

didn't sit down. She still demanded to know where we were being taken. A cop, whose face I'll never forget, then pushed her down and grabbed her hair and began to stomp her feet. That's when Mrs. Reed tried to assist her. A cop then handcuffed Mrs. Quinn and caught Mrs. Reed and pushed her over us and then another cop grabbed Mrs. Reed and caught her by her hair, not her shoulder or her arm but her hair, and dragged her to the back of the bus. Meanwhile hell was going on up in the front of the bus. A cop had then struck Mrs. Quinn in the eye and begun to punch her in the mouth and she began to cry, because they were hurting her. She tried to get up. That's when the man with the grey suit who gave his name as Burney and Bullshine placed his knee in Mrs. Quinn's stomach and began to push her there. Shirley Martin told the man to stop doing Mrs. Quinn like that and a cop, smashed her in the mouth with his fist. We got to the county farm; they placed us in a cell with concrete, Mrs. Quinn by herself and the boys to themselves. Then we went in for questioning. When Marionette Travis went in they asked her to spell her name over and over. She kept spelling it. When she got tired she told the man "I've spelled it for you once." That's when Jimmy Felder, identified by Mrs. Dillon, slapped her and told her not to talk to him like that. That night nobody hardly slept because it was so cold. The only way you could try to keep warm was to sleep together and place a bunk bed over you.

ANONYMOUS

*From the diary of two civil rights workers. The "Mrs. Quinn" referred to in this first account is the Pike County Chairman of the Freedom Democratic Party.*

### THE ARREST

On December 28, 1964 we were arrested when we entered a Malt Shop at 6:30. We walked into the Malt Shop. We sat down in the first booth of the place, began to talk among ourselves. We did not ask for service. The lady began saying "Get out. I am not going to serve you." We still sat there, paying her little or no attention. Judy told her that if she called the policeman and they ask us to leave, we would leave. "I am not calling the policeman," she said. She began saying "Get out. I am not going to serve you people" over and over again. Then her old man walked in and saw what was going on. I got up and ask the lady did she have change for a dollar. She said "I don't

have any change." I went back to the booth and sat down. Amos gave me a dime. I played a record. The policeman came. They walked in and said to the lady "Do you want to sign a petition?" She said yes. He walked to us and said "Let's go." We got up and they drove us down to the police station. There were four officers. They ask our names and place of birth. Bennie Jackson was charged with being drunk.

We entered the jail about 7:30. They took things from us like rings, watches, belts, eye glasses, money. In our cells there were about 4 men who were already in jail. I guess they were ages from 20 to 60. They asked us what did we do. We told them we were civil rights workers. At that point they began acting real friendly. They offered us the best beds. The place was filthy. Water from the toilet was on the floor. There was about 4 beds. They were filled. There was one heater. It was bad. It threw out heat about every 30 minutes. We talked to the people in the cell. We asked them what were they put in jail for. Some said they were put in jail on drunk charges. Later on that night about 10:30 the police came to our cell with a Negro man. They said he was drunk, but he said he was not drunk. They kicked him and beat him.

We sat around and talked to the other two guys in the cell. One was about 34; the other was about 21. We spent about 36 hours in jail altogether. It was rough. I don't believe I could stay in that jail a week, but if it is for civil rights I could stay.

HENRY COLEMAN, SNCC Staff, Vicksburg, age 20

### "I WANT TO WORK HARDER"

The writer is a young girl from Hattiesburg, Mississippi who works with the Movement there. She was in a cafe with two other civil rights workers, both white, when a woman came in—Negro, very poor, very drunk, very sad. The woman sat and talked with the girls. Among other things she said, "You girls should talk things over each night. You should care for one another always."

This is what Sherrie wrote about the incident:

"Barbara, Phyllis and I went to Laurel to see Gwen about a meeting we were having Friday night in Hattiesburg.

"After seeing Gwen we went to a cafe and got some coffee. A lady came in the cafe and everybody in the cafe laughed at her.

"Then she came over to where we were sitting and started talking

about some things. We didn't move. People thought we were going to leave but we didn't.

"It seemed that she was the laughing stock of Laurel.

"Before I knew it I was crying and at that time I didn't know why I was crying.

"That night I prayed to God. I asked if all men were made equal why do some people have to go through so much hell when others don't.

"People like that lady make me want to work harder than I would if there were not people like her who need help."

SHERRIE ANN MAXIE, *age 19*

The woman in the story typifies those that have experienced the tragedy of our society in the most bitter sense. These are the people who are not included in the work of most of the national civil rights organizations.

Some of the younger groups, working in the south, have begun to explore the problem and have attempted some solutions. SNCC's work is done almost exclusively among the poorer and more deprived people of the rural south. They have added large numbers of the people that they work with to the staff of their organization. Yet even though they comprise the bulk of that staff, now they are not included in the organization in the way that, for example, the college student is. This probably means that the answer for "local people" is to form their own organizations and that the national groups will have to see their work as helping people in the various areas. Perhaps the MFDP can show us the way to the solution of a problem that the other civil rights organizations have been unwilling or simply unqualified to deal with.

### *STEPS OF A SOUTHERN WHITE TRAGEDY*

I am not quite sure when one first begins to realize that something is badly wrong, but you do realize it very early. Perhaps it comes when you are only four or five and your mother tells you that you can't play with certain people and you asked her "why?." "Why" she replies, "why you just can't, it isn't done." And some how you just know not to ask anymore; you just accept "because it isn't done."

Most of the time, you accept what you have been told—for after all, who on earth can know more than your parents, and if they say so, then it must be so. But if you doubt at all, if you wonder at all what the whispering is about, and the thin line of fear and doubt

that you seem to feel, all forces of your society and environment soon discover them and try their best to force all such thoughts out of your mind. Your formal training may begin with the first grade where you hear teachers and class mates remarking on the danger of allowing "niggers" into the schools. They never seem to know, point blank, *what the danger is*, but somehow you get the message that something awful would happen if school integration should ever come; and after all, who knows better now than your teachers? Even your church seems to echo this dread, unworded fear of "what would happen if..."

But, if somehow you escape this "line of thought training" you are "marked" as different, and funny. Your friends, teachers, fellow workers, all will regard you with suspicion, and you will never seem to have the complete trust of any, except the few other "out-casts" such as yourself, and even with them there is the feeling of "can I really trust them, can I really say what I believe around them?" Thus you find yourself in a very lonely, small world, full of doubt concerning your own beliefs. You begin to wonder if you are really right, and can so many others be wrong. Why, you begin to ask yourself, if I am right, aren't there more like me who believe the same thing? And all of a sudden that loneliness seems to become too much to take, and you find that it would just be so easy to slip back, and to believe that in truth "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world." After all, who knows better than those that make up your world. So you have a choice, keep quiet and accept, or get out. And when you're young, and have no place to go the world outside seems so very big, and very cold.

Thus the final step in the southern tragedy is taken. You fall back, close your mind and accept the long constant badgering which you have been hearing all along. Then, as the time passes, you begin to feel that perhaps it isn't so bad after all.

Sure, the doubts are still there, and the unworded fear, but they are somehow smaller, and much quieter, for you have learned to control them, to somehow combat them—and now you're safe. Then, one day it happens, your child looks up at you questioning, and asks "why?" "Why," you reply, "why you just can't, it isn't done."

LISA KAY NATHANIELSON, age 21

People like the girl who has written this, a 21-year-old, native white Mississippian who works in the Movement, have achieved what is all but impossible for most of us. They have examined the heart



of their societies and the communities which produced them. Such questioning results in complete isolation if one is a white Mississippian. Most of us cannot survive isolation. We must have a feeling of community with our surroundings, so we draw a line beyond which we will not examine or question.

For this reason there is much to be learned from the white southerner who joins the Movement. Those of us who are from the North, particularly the whites, have grown up in an atmosphere in which treatment of Negroes in the South was verbally deplored. White southerners were seen to be some sort of "moral idiots," while we, of course, were enlightened. What this means is that while it is very fashionable nowadays for northern whites to come south to join the Movement, as often as not they come only to find that they have no idea what the Movement is really about. Those that have stuck it out and stayed for a year or more seem to find that their work requires that they question much more than just the voting laws in the South. Many are beginning to talk about the period of "unlearning" which one must go through before it is possible to really "listen" and learn from the people around them.

What threatens to be more of a problem at this point is the Negro leadership itself. While the whites have been forced to take long, usually critical, looks at themselves and their roots, because of the hostility of a "black" Movement, the Negroes, with often very similar backgrounds, have not. As a result some of us think that the Movement is suffering from an overdose of "college-trained," middle-class oriented control, by a leadership which too often borrows forms and structures from the institutions it organizes demonstrations against.

This set of problems is being constantly discussed and argued about in our work in the deep South, particularly since the Summer Project in Mississippi.

### *"WHAT WE HAVE DISCOVERED"*

What we have discovered over the last few years of our activities in the South, is that oppression and restriction is not limited to the bullets of local racists' shotgun blasts, or assaults at county courthouses, or the expulsion of sharecroppers from plantations, but that it (oppression and restriction) is imbedded in a complex national structure, many of the specifics of which are oft times difficult to discern, but which govern every facet of our lives. What is relevant to our lives is constantly defined for us; we are taught it in every waking hour;

it is pounded in us via radio, TV, newspapers, most of which are the tools of our oppressors. Definitions are articulated to us through the use of terms such as, "qualified," "responsible," "security," "patriotism," "our way of life," "the American way of life," "nigger," "leader," "politics," and a thousand others, infinitely more subtle and complex. Our lives are pointed out for us in a million irrelevant directions, and what we are finding we have to deal with if we're talking about change (whether in Mississippi or New York) is: *Who points out and determines the direction of our lives; how do they do it and get away with it?*

The most immediate implication of an exploration into this question seems to be an examination into the day to day realities of our existence as only we can know it. One thing that is vividly clear to us in the south today is that we are denied our rights through the use of political machinery. The part of this machine that we have come into direct contact and conflict with, has been state political machinery. This state machine has done at least three things that we've experienced at many levels. It has kept us: (1) *separated* (through the use of segregation laws, by playing white against black, by perpetuating the myth that we can never get together without knowing what they know, e.g. in other words without being "qualified" and they define that word), (2) *ignorant* (communications media orient us to the irrelevant, the "qualified" gear us to become "responsible" to them, the lie of "white folks business" is perpetuated, we wander confused, aspiring to "the American way of life" rather than our own; our schools are committed to a policy of non-think, and students to an attitude of no-questions), (3) *afraid* (through the use of gestapo-like law enforcers, by binding us in their laws and customs, which operate above us because we're not "qualified," tacitly endorsing terror, e.g. the White Citizens Council getting money from the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, the perversion of justice in the courts).

We have found that we cannot even talk about an end to oppression and restriction in the South without these structures feeling responsible to the people of the South (or the nation). Government structure (which includes all the institutions that relate to it, e.g. schools, churches, banks, communications media, big business—these control the thinking and create the values) cannot feel this responsibility, for they have isolated themselves from people in the interest of maintaining their positions. Consequently, we are governed from a kind of isolated authority which has wrapped us in structures that evade our efforts to function in them at any level. Herein is the crux

of our disfranchisement. As we begin to trace this government monster called "American way of life" we are discovering that avenues of knowledge as to *what it is* and *how it works* specifically, are not available to us. We have begun to suspect that the key to dealing with it does not lie in plowing through all the intricacies of how it operates top to bottom, which we mostly cannot see anyway, but rather, with its effects locally, and our daily oppression.

You're in Mississippi, or Alabama, or Georgia, or Arkansas, defined by somebody as "nigger." This reality is understood only in terms of what it is, for there is no place to understand why it is. Attempts to understand why, means the asking of questions, the exposure of inconsistency, and the asking of more questions. To encourage questions, is to encourage challenge, which is to encourage overthrow. To talk about why a policeman hits a Negro across the head, is to talk about why that policeman does not feel responsible to Negroes, and who he is responsible to, and why they don't feel responsible, and what can be done to make them feel responsible, or who can be placed in those positions that will feel responsible, and how they can be placed in those positions, and whether or not those positions are necessary. This kind of questioning and exposure undermines those persons in isolated authority, because people might organize themselves around the fact that they can makes these authorities irrelevant; which is to leave them with no authority at all. This is the latent threat of the "Negro Movement" in the south, for "keeping the niggers in their place" is just an extreme of keeping *people* in their place, all of which is keeping everybody from dealing with what is relevant in their lives, or even finding out what relevancies they have to deal with. This kind of questioning threatens, so this kind of questioning is not allowed. Discontent has been forced underground, where it rumbles, and is felt more than seen.

Yet, sometimes, this undercurrent of discontent is expressed; maybe by a handful of kids wearing SNCC buttons to school, or by someone standing up in civics class wanting to talk about voting, or the "freedom riders." It gets scribbled on a piece of paper sometimes: "If the white man is free, why can't the black man be?" And sometimes, these expressions soar:

I wish that I was free  
free as I can be  
I'd fly, oh I'd fly  
away over the sea

I'd fly over the mountains  
I'd fly over the sea  
And I'd be as proud  
proud as I can be

But I'm not a free bird  
not as free as I can be  
that is why, oh that is why  
these chains are binding me

If given a chance these expressions can be beautiful. Yet too often, it is muttered bitterly, and in a vacuum, as Ernest George of Mississippi mutters: "Can't teach me a damn thing in school that a nigger in Mississippi don't know already." The Brewer brothers of Tallahatchie County got the education they needed. They heard while being pounded to the floor of a plantation store by a group of white men, shortly after a trip north, "you're back in Mississippi now, nigger."

What other knowledge is needed, and can be expected of Ernest George, the Brewer brothers, and millions like them as long as they must exist in a society built to cage them? Their function has been reduced to acting on what is defined for them—defined by the cop with the stick.

People in the south, essentially black people, are beginning to build their own life. They are setting their own standards of "qualifications." They have found that they have not been able to participate in the life that they have always known. Up to this point of new building, the contradiction of all the kinds of education that they have experienced (from an attack by a cop, to public schooling) has been that it bore no relevance to functioning in a society that was not theirs. As people have started motion and agitation in their communities, they have discovered that they need an education that is geared to the relevancies they discover while building this new life *if they are to function* and participate in it. For, education is not the development of intellectual skills, but a preparation for participation in living.

CHARLIE COBB

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*Charlie Cobb is regarded as one of the finest creative writers in the Movement. A former Howard University student, he joined the Movement in Mississippi in September 1963 and is now on assignment with the SNCC staff in Albany, Georgia.*