My name is Robert Moses and I'm field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. I first came South July, 1960 on a field trip for SNCC, went through Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana gathering people to go to the October conference. That was the first time that I met Amsy Moore. At that time we sat down and planned the voter registration drive for Mississippi. I returned in the summer of 1961 to start that drive. We were to start in Cleveland, Mississippi in the delta. However, we couldn't; we didn't have any equipment; we didn't even have a place at that time to meet. So we went down to McComb at the invitation of C.C. Bryan who was the local head of the NAACP. And we began setting up a voter registration drive in McComb, Mississippi.

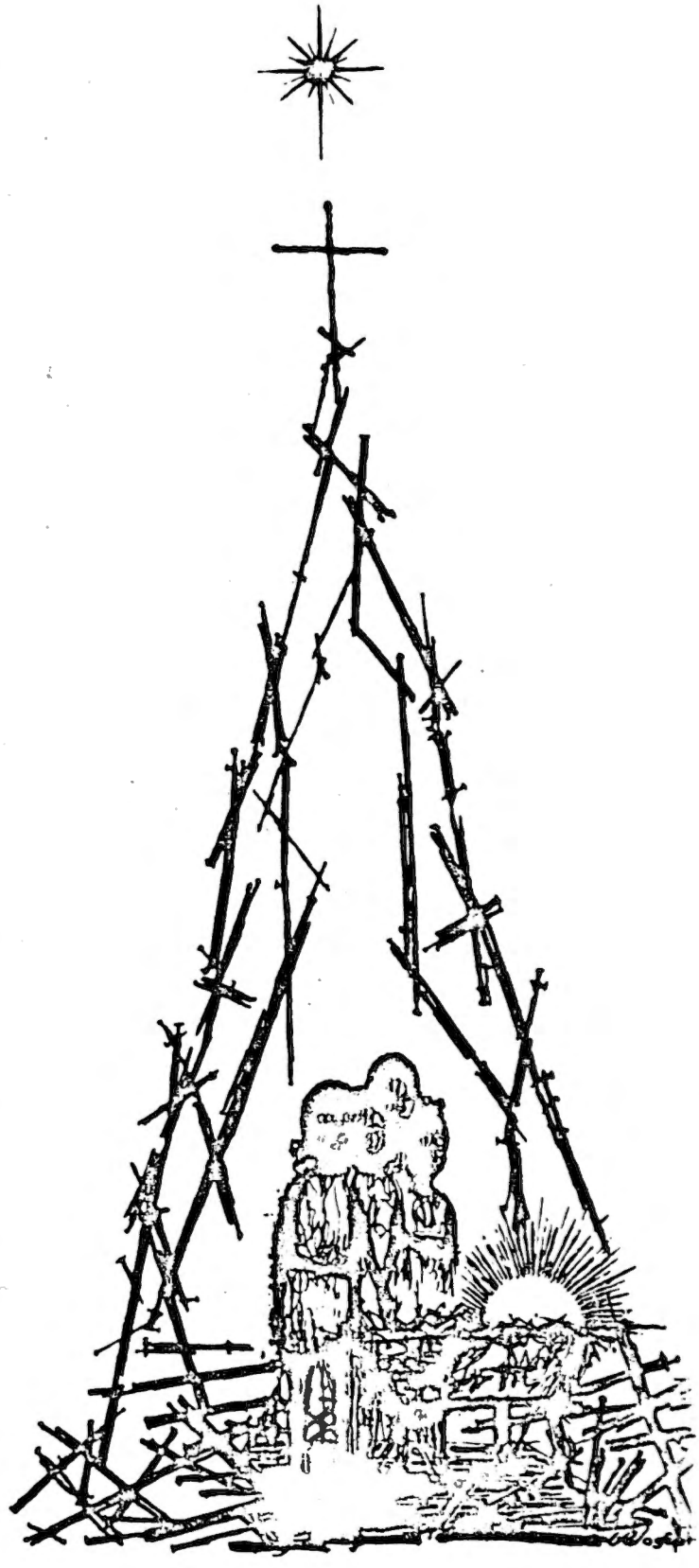
What did we do? Well, for two weeks I did nothing but drive around the town talking to the business leaders, the ministers, the people in the town, asking them if they would support ten students who had come in to work on a voter registration drive. We got a commitment from them to support students for the month of August and to pay for their room and board and some of their transportation while they were there. The drive began August 1, and lasted, as it turned out, through December, not just through the month of August. We began in McComb canvassing for about a two week period. This means that we went around house-to-house, door-to-door in the hot sun everyday because the most important thing was to convince the local townspeople that we meant business, that is, that we were serious, that we were not only young, but that we were people who were responsible. What do you tell somebody when you go to their door? Well, first you tell them who you are, what you're trying to do, that you're working on voter registration. You have a form that you try to get them to fill out. Now the technique that we found best usable, I think, was to present the form to them and say, "Have you ever tried to fill out this form? Would you like to sit down now and try to fill it out?" And then, psychologically as they were in the process of filling out the voter registration form, one of the questions asked them to do something while they were at the registrar's office, so that psychologically they have to complete a gap and imagine themselves at the registrar's office. As you know, in Mississippi, currently you have to fill out a form which has about 21 questions on it, and in addition to routine questions, it has a question where you write and then interpret some section of the constitution of Mississippi and finally a section where you write and describe the duties and obligations of a citizen in Mississippi.

Now we did this for about two weeks and finally began to get results. That is, people began to go down to Magnolia, Mississippi which is the county seat of Pike County and attempt to register. In the meantime, quite naturally, people from Amite and Walthall County, which are the two adjacent counties to Pike county, came over asking us if we wouldn't accompany them in schools in their counties so they could go down and try to register also. And this point should be made quite clear, because many people have been critical of going into such tough counties so early in the game. The position is simply this: that farmers came over and were very anxious to try and register and you couldn't very well turn them down; one, just from the human point of view, they had greater needs than those people in Pike County where we were working and, secondly, from the psychological point of view where the whole problem in Mississippi is pervaded with fear. The problem is that you can't be in the position of turning down the tough areas because the people then, I think, would simply loose confidence in you; so, we accepted this. We worked out a plan first whereby some of the students, John Hardy and two other students who had just come off the Freedom Rides, went into Walthall County to begin work. That was about the middle of August.

At about the same time, I accompanied about three people down to Liberty in Amite County to begin our first registration attempt there. One was a very old man, and then two ladies, middle-aged. We left early morning of August 15, it was a Tuesday, we arrived at the courthouse at about 10 o'clock. The registrar came out, I waited by the side for the man or one of the ladies to say something to the registrar. He asked them what did they want, what were they here for in a very rough tone of voice. They didn't say anything, they were literally paralyzed with fear. So, after a while, I spoke up and said that they would like to come to register to vote. So, he asked, "Well, who are you? What do you have to do with

them? Are you here to register?" So I told him who I was and that we were conducting a school in McComb and that these people had attended the school and they wanted an opportunity to register. Well, he said that I'd have to wait "cuz there was someone there filling out the form." Well, there was a young white lady there with her husband and she was sitting down completing the registration form. When she finished, then our people started to register one at a time. In the meantime, a procession of people began moving in and out of the registration office. The sherrif, a couple of his deputies, people from the tax office, people who do the drivers' license, looking in, staring, moving back out, muttering. A highway patrolman finally came in and sat down in the office. And we stayed that way in sort of uneasy tension all morning. The first person who filled out the form took a long time to do it and it was noontime before he was finished. When we came back, I was not permitted to sit in the office, but was told to sit on the front porch, which I did. We finally finished the whole process at about 4:30; all of the three people had had a chance to register, at least to fill out the form. This was victory, because they had been down a few times before and had not had a chance to even fill out the forms.

On the way home we were followed by the highway patrolman who had spent the day in the registrar's office, Officer Carlyle. He tailed us about ten miles, about 25 or 30 feet behind us, all the way back towards McComb. At one point we pulled off, and he passed us, circled around us and we pulled off as he was passing us in the opposite direction, and then he turned around and followed us again. Finally he flagged us down and I got out of the car to ask him what the trouble was because the people in the car were very, very frightened. He asked me who I was, what my business was, and told me that I was interfering in what he was doing. I said I simply wanted to find out what the problem was and what we were being stopped for. He told me to get back in the car. As I did so, I jotted his name down. He then opened the car door, shoved me in and said, "Get in the car, nigger," slamming the door after me. He then told us to follow him and took us over to McComb where I was told that I was placed under arrest. He called up the prosecuting attorney; he came down, and then he and the highway patrolman sat down and looked through the law books to find a charge. They first charged me with interfering with an officer in the process of arresting somebody. Then he found out that the only person arrested was myself and they changed the charge to interfering with an officer in the discharge of his duties. The county attorney asked me if I was ready for trial and I said, could I make a phone call. He said yeah, so I picked up the phone and called Washington, D.C. and the Justice Department, because I had been in communication with some members of the Justice Department and particularly John Doar and had received letters deliniating those sections of the Civil Rights act of 1957 and 1960 which guaranteed protection to those people who are trying to register and anyone who is aiding people who are trying to register. And he also indicated that if we had any trouble we were to call Washing-



"THE FREEDOM TREE" IN MEMORY OF:
THE CHILDREN OF BIRMINGHAM

ton or the nearest office of the FBI. So I called them, collect; the people in the office were rather astonished that the call went through and then they began to get figity. Well, as to the call, I explained to Mr. Doar exactly what happened in their presence and told him that I thought the people were being intimidated simply because they had gone down to register.

Well, we had the trial right after that. I was found guilty of this charge of interfering with an officer, and the judge and the county prosecutor went out, consulted, and came back and I was given a suspended sentence, 90 days suspended sentence, and fined $5 for the cost of court. I refused to pay the $5 cost of court and argued that I shouldn't be given anything at all and should be set free since I was obviously not guilty. I was taken to jail then, and this was my first introduction to Mississippi jails. I spent a couple days in jail and was finally bailed out when the bondsman came through, supplied by the NAACP. We decided at that point to appeal the case, though later the appeal was dropped. Well, that was our first introduction to Amite county.

Immediately after that we rode out to Steptoe's house, who was the local president of the NAACP, in the southern part of the county, and made plans to set up a school on his farm. We did and for the last two weeks in August we proceeded to teach people, farmers in the southern part of Amite County at the little church there, coming two , three, sometimes five at a time. We were severly handicapped because we didn't have any transportation. And the farms there were fairly far apart, so we had to wait on the people at the Church. While we were out there next week another team went down to Liberty to register, and they didn't have any difficulty at all. This was Aug. 22. In fact, the boys that went down with them were able to stay in the registrar's office and the people were able to complete their registration without difficulty. They sent word of this back out to us at Steptoe's and we were somewhat encouraged by this.

After that, we planned to make another registration attempt on the 19th of August, which was again a Tuesday. We didn't figure we would have much trouble, although there had been rumors sort of floating around out there at Steptoe's that there might be trouble if people made another registration attempt down there at Liberty. This was the day then that Curtis Dawson and Preacher Knox and I were to go down and try to register. This was the day that Curtis Dawson drove to Steptoe's, picked me up and drove down to Liberty and we were to meet Knox at the courthouse lawn, and instead we were to walk through the town and on the way back were accosted by Billy Jack Caston and some other boys. I was severely beaten. I remember very sharply that I didn't want to go immediately back into McComb because my shirt was very bloody and I figured that if we went back in we would probably be fighting everybody. So, instead, we went back out to Steptoe's where we washed down before we came back into McComb.

Well, that very same day, they had had the first sit-in in McComb, so when we got back everybody was excited and a mass meeting was planned for that very night. And Hollis and Curtis had sat in the Woolworth lunch counter in McComb and the town was in a big uproar. We had a mass meeting that night and made plans for two things: one, the kids made plans to continue their sit-in activity, and two, we made plans to go back down to Liberty to try to register some more. We felt it was extremely important that we try and go back to town immediately so the people in that county wouldn't feel that we had been frightened off by the beating and before they could get a chance there to rally their forces.

Accordingly, on Thursday, August 31, there was more activity in Liberty and McComb. In McComb, there were more sit-ins, in Liberty, another registration attempt coupled with an attempt by us to find the person who had done the beating and have his trial. Well, it turned out that we did find him, that they did have his trial, that they had a six-man Justice of the Peace jury, that in a twinkling of an eye the courthouse was packed. That is, the trial was scheduled that day and in two hours it began and in those two hours farmers came in from all parts of the county bearing their guns, sitting in the courthouse. We were advised not to sit in the courthouse except while we testified, otherwise we were in the back room. After we testified, the sheriff came back and told us that he didn't think it was safe for us to remain there while the jury gave its decision. Accordingly, he escorted us to the county line. We read in the papers the next day that Billy Jack Caston had been acquitted.

In the meantime, in McComb, more sit-ins had taken place. Brenda Travis had sat in this time; she was a young girl, just 16 years old, and had been very active with us in the voter registration in McComb. And I mean active. She had walked the streets every day with us from 2-5 or 12-5, as it were, in the hot sun. And she'd been fed up with the

THE SEPARATISTS

response of local Negroes in McComb, and the seeming apathy and the feat in their inability to move, that is their absolute immobility in the face of going down and facing the registrar in Magnolia. Her response was to take some kind of action on her own, so she joined the sit-in group. This infuriated the community, the white and the Negro community. The Negroes were infuriated that she was so young to be down there in that jail, and the white people were infuriated that we would send a young girl down there like that. Actually, we hadn't known her age. I wasn't in town at the time and I knew her age; she had told the other people that were conducting the sit-ins, Marion Barry and some of the other SNCC workers, that she was over 18. At this point then, the town was in an uproar. We were having meetings, the white people were having meetings in their section of the twon, the Negro people were having meetings in their section of the town.

To top it all off, the next week John Hardy was arrested and put in jail in Walthall county. He had been working there for two weeks and they had been taking people down, and finally one day he had taken some people down to the registrar's office, had walked in, they had been refused the right to register, and he had asked the registrar why. The registrar recognized him, took the gun out of his drawer and smacked John on the side of his head with a pistol. John staggered out onto the street and was walking down the street when he was accosted by the sheriff who arrested him and charged him with disturbing the peace. John wound up in the Magnolia jail in Pike County because it was too hot for him in Walthall County, and they had to transfer him immediately. He was in the cell next to the sit-in kids. That was the first time I had gone down and had a chance to see them all in jail down there. It was pretty hot down there and they told me that they were not allowed to take baths, that the food was pretty bad and their spirits, however, were good, except that they were obviously losing weight and one of them was very anxious to come. Well, the Justice Department entered immediately on John Hardy's case. Took place I think on Sept. 7. Two days later they had filed a suit in the District Federal Court in Jackson, asking for an injunction to stop the trial which was to take place the next day, I think, in Walthall County. Judge Cox, who was the first appointee of President Eisenhower and a long friend of Senator Eastland, an obvious patronage or an obvious result of the senatorial privilege in appointing judicial appointments to the Federal Courts, refused to give them a favorable hearing. I suppose that it was a victory that he heard it at all that evening and that they were able then to fly on to Montgomery that night, I think it was a Thurdsay night, and wake up Judge Reeves in Montgomery, Alabama at 12 o'clock at night and ask him to give a temporary injunction and overrule Judge Cox.

Well, in the meantime, we had to go back to Walthall County, John Hardy and myself, to face this trial the next morning. We didn't know whether the Justice Department would be able to get a stay or not. I remember that morning that we were both rather quiet and a little shook at the thought of going back into Walthall County to face this trial. We got there early in the morning, and there were people gathering and gathered as soon as we appeared. They sent us up into the buzzard's roost, a little sort of sloping shelf-like extension at the back of the courtroom at Tylertown which is the county seat of Walthall County. Then all the old farmers and the young ones and the thugs and all-man male chorus gathered downstairs to see if the trial was going to take place. While we were sitting there, the county prosecuting attorney came and announced that the Justice Dept. had obtained a stay from Judge Reeves in Alabama and that the trial would be continued from term of court to term of court and that until that time John Hardy was free and not bound to stay in jail. So we left, at least we tried to leave. The people were rather thick in the corridors as we were leaving and were grabbing hold of John by the shirt-sleeve and making nasty remarks at him as we left. We finally got through into the car and there, of all things, the car door was stuck, so we couldn't get it open. Finally, a local policeman came and told us that we had better hurry up and get out of there because he could only hold up the people back of us for so long. We backed out into the mob and then got on out of town being very careful to stay under the speed limit. We finally got back into McComb. Well, that was about it. A couple of days before John Hardy was arrested, we had gone back into Amite County to Liberty. This time I was not beaten, but Travis Britt was. I think that was on the 5th of September, and I stood by and watched Travis get pummeled by an old man, tall, reedy and thin, very, very, very mean with a lot of hatred in him. Luckily, he wasn't very strong and he didn't do too much damage to Travis who suffered an eye bruise and some head knocks. At that particular occasion, Travis and I had been sitting out front of the courthouse and then decided to move around back because the people began to gather out front. Finally, everybody, about 15 people, gathered around back and began questioning Travis and myself. My only reaction to this in all these instances is simply to shut up, to be silent. I get very, very depressed. So people were talking with Travis and he was answering them some. They were asking him where was he from and how come a nigger from New York City could think that he could come down and teach people down here how to register to vote and have all those problems up there in New York City, problems of white girls going with nigger boys and all such like that. Finally they began to beat on Travis, and I started going towards the sheriff's office and was cut off. Finally went back and tried to get Travis away from this fellow who was beating on him. We did this. And we walked over to a truck nearby and got in it and went on back to McComb. Well, the Travis Britt incident followed by the John Hardy incident in Walthall County just about cleaned us out. The farmers in both those counties were no longer willing to go down; people in Pike County and McComb were in an uproar over the sit-in demonstrations and the fact that Brenda Travis, a sixteen year-old girl, was in jail, and for the rest of the month of September we just had a tough time. Wasn't much we could do. The kids were in jail; people were in jail on the sit-in charges, had a $5,000 bail over their heads, and the problem was to raise that money

and get them out of jail, and then sit down and see if we couldn't collect the pieces together.

Well, we got through September aided in great measure by some of the lawyers from the Justice Department who finally began to come in investigating the voting complaints. They stayed in for about a two-week period and while they were there they gave a lot of support and confidence to the people of the Negro community and allowed us to go back into Walthall and Amite Counties and to interview all the people who had been involved in the voter registration campaign and raise some hope that perhaps something would be done.

And then, finally, the boom lowered, on September 31: Herbert Lee was killed in Amite County. We had spent the previous week in Amite County with lawyers from the Justice Department investigating and taking affidavits from all the people who had been down to register. The Sunday before Lee was killed. I was down at Steptoe's with John Doar from the Justice Department and he asked Steptoe was there any danger in that area, who was causing the trouble and who were the people in danger. Steptoe told him that E.H. Hearst who lived across from him had been threatening people and that specifically he, Steptoe, Herbert Lee and George Reese were in danger of losing their lives. We went out, but didn't see Lee that afternoon. At night John Doar and the other lawyers from the Justice Department left. The following morning about 12 noon, Doc Anderson came by the Voter Registration office and said a man had been shot in Amite County—that he had brought him over to McComb and he was lying on the table in the funeral home in McComb, and he asked me if I might have known him. I went down to take a look at the body and it was Herbert Lee; There was a bullet hole in the left side of his head just above the ear. He had on his farm clothes and I was told that he had been shot that morning. Well, wasn't much to do; we waited until nightfall and then went out into Amite County and for the next four or five nights we rode the roads, from the time it got dark until light, about three or four in the morning.

Our first job was to try to track down those people, those Negroes, who had been at the shooting and to try to get their stories, and there were three such people who had been at the shooting, who had seen the whole incident and essentially they told the same story. Essentially, the story was this: they were standing at the cotton gin early in the morning and they saw Herbert Lee drive up in his truck with a load of cotton, E.H. Hearst following behind him in an empty truck. Hearst got out of his truck and came to the cab on the driver's side of Lee's truck and began arguing with Lee. He began gesticulating towards Lee and pulled out a gun which he had under his shirt and began threatening Lee with it. One of the people that was close by said that Hearst was telling Lee, "I'm not fooling around this time, I really mean business." and that Lee told him, "Put the gun down. I won't talk to you unless you put the gun down." Hearst put the gun back under his coat and then Lee slid out on the other side, on the offside of the cab. As he got out, Hearst ran around the front of the cab, took his gun out again, pointed it at Lee and shot him. This was the story that three Negro witnesses told us on three separate nights as we went out in Amite County, tracking them down, knocking on their doors, waking them up in the middle of the night. They also told us another story: two of them admitted that they had been pressured by the local authorities, the sheriffs and the deputy sheriffs, and some of the white people in town, that there had been a fight, that Lee had had a tire tool, that he had tried to hit Hearst with the tire tool, and that Hearst had shot Lee in self-defense. They said that this story was not true, but that they had been forced to tell it for fear of their own lives. Lee, in any case, was a small man, about 5'4", weighing about 150 lbs. Hearst was a large man, about 6'2", upwards of 200 lbs., I understand. It is inconceivable that he could have been so threatened by Lee with a tire tool, that he would have had to shoot him. The fact was, as I believe, as one of the witnesses who was standing directly behind Lee stated, was that Lee never raised a hand to hit him and that Hearst simply ran around the front of his car and shot him. Doctor Anderson, who received the body later in McComb, said that there were no powder burns on Lee's head and that it was not possible, as Hearst claimed, that the gun went off accidently as he hit Lee on the side of the head. Lee's body lay on the ground that morning for two hours, uncovered, until they finally got a funeral home in McComb to take it in. No one in Liberty would touch it. They had a coroner's jury that very same afternoon. Hearst was acquitted. He never spent a moment in jail. In fact, the sheriff had whisked him away very shortly after the crime was committed. I remember reading very bitterly in the papers the next morning, a little short article on the front page of the *McComb Enterprise Journal*, said that the Negro had been shot in self-defense as he was trying to attack E.H. Hearst. That was it. You might have thought he had been a bum. There was not mention that Lee was a farmer, that he had a family, that he had nine kids, beautiful kids, that he had been a farmer all his life in Amite County and that he had been a very substantial citizen. It was as if he had been drunk or something and had gotten into fight and gotten shot. That wasn't the end of the case; we tried to track down and see if we could prove or attach it to the voter registration drive. Now we knew in our hearts and minds that Hearst was attacking Lee because of the voter registration drive, and I suppose that we all felt guilty and felt responsible, because it's one thing to get beat up and its another thing to be responsible, or to participate in some way in a killing. We found out only that Hearst had been waiting for Lee on the road at a State Senator's house the morning of the killing, that when Lee came by Hearst said, "Oh, there goes Lee. I have something to see him about." And he got into a truck and drove off. Wasn't even driving his own truck, was driving Billy Jack Caston's truck, yet the shooting was done with his own gun, which probably means that he was carrying it on his person, which we also know is contrary to his accustomed use. People saw them passing on the highway first close behind Lee and then the people saw the actual killing. But, all the material of the Citizen's Councils meetings that had taken place in Liberty where people had come from counties 200 miles away to discuss the voter registration drive, the

AN AMERICAN SPEAKS

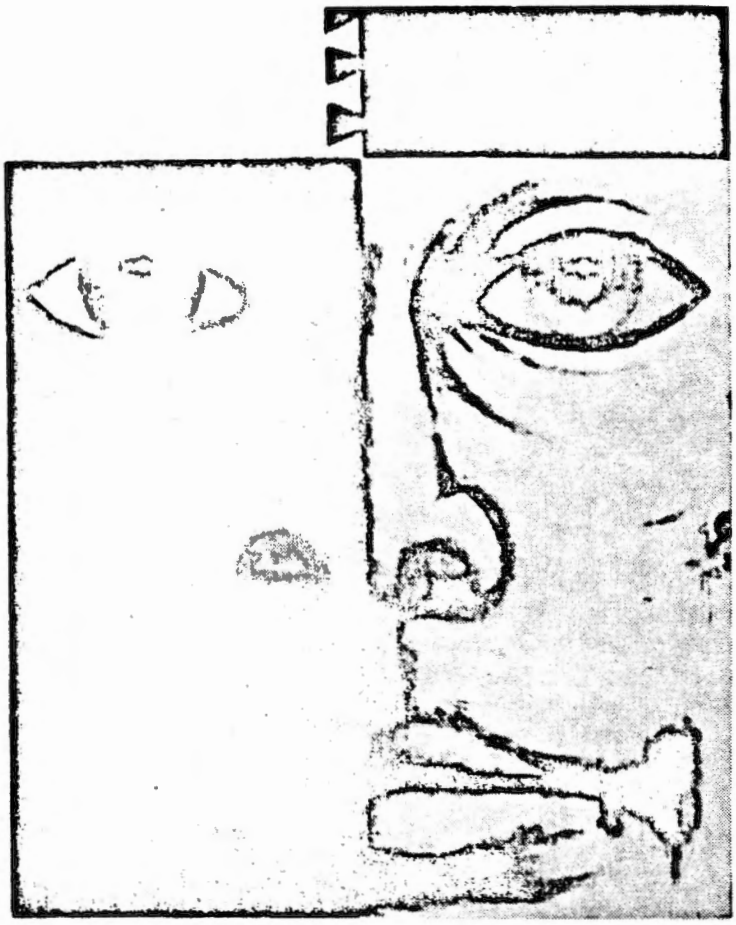
plans that had been made at the meetings, the plans to stop the drive, were not available and try as we might we couldn't get people who even lived in town to breathe a word about any of the things which the white people invariably tell Negroes when things are about to happen.

There was in the end, about a month later, one of the witnesses came over to McComb to tell us that they were going to have the grand jury hearing, that he had told a lie at the coroner's jury, that he wanted to know that if he told the truth the at the grand jury hearing, would it be possible to provide him with protection. We called the Justice Department and talked to responsible officials in that department. They told us that there was no way possible to provide protection for a witness at such a hearing and that probably, in any case, it didn't matter what he testified and that Hearst would be found innocent. So this man went back and told the story that he told the coroner's jury to the grand jury and they did obviously fail to indict Hearst.

For this man, that wasn't the end of his troubles, and about six or eight months later, his jaw was broken by the deputy sheriff who knew that he had told the FBI that he had been forced to tell a lie to the grand jury and to the coroner's jury, because the deputy sheriff told him exactly what he had told the FBI. It's for reasons like these that we believe the local FBI is sometimes in collusion with the local sheriffs and chiefs of police and that Negro witnesses aren't safe in telling inside information to local agents of the FBI. Well, I supposed that we would have been very, very, very beat down except that we didn't have the time.

Shortly after Lee was killed, the kids were released from jail who had been in jail for a month on the sit-in cases, including Brenda. Brenda was not allowed to go back in the school and early in October she and 115 students marched out and marched downtown. It's no doubt in my mind that part of the reason for the march, part of the reason for the willingness of so many students to do it, was the whole series of beatings culminating in the killing that had taken place in that area. Well, needless to say the white community was completely on edge by this time. 115 students stopped in front of the city hall to begin praying one by one, Brenda first, then Curtis, then Hollis, then Bobby Talbort and then finally all of us herded up the steps and into the city courthouse, and Bob Zellner, who was the only white participant, was attacked on the steps as he went up and then the mob outside, waiting, milling around, threatening, and inside, the police brought the people down, the white people, the so-called good citizens of the town, to come down and take a look at this Moses guy, and they would come down and stand at the front of the jail and say, "Where's Moses?" And then the kids would point me out and I was again, very, very quiet, and then all the way down and the people would stand up, just look at them, say one word, or maybe two and that went on the rest of that day.

We were finally taken up one by one into a kind of kangaroo court which they held upstairs which was crowded with citizens from the town: the sheriff, the local county attorney, the local judges. The purpose of the court was to



THE MILITANT

gain information about the planning of the demonstration so they could prepare their case. We, of course, didn't have to answer any of their questions; nevertheless, we did. One by one we went up and told our story. I remember when I went in, the room was very tense. All the people were sort of sitting around on the edges of the benches in the dark and the sheriff was standing and at one point, threatened me about saying yes-sir and no-sir. I remember that I finally just answered the questions without either a yes or no. Well, they let all the kids who were under 18 off, and took those who were over 18 down to the county jail and we stayed in jail for several days. All of the boys were piled into a room with a concrete bunker where we had to sleep on the bunker and on the floor. Then finally we were taken into the various cells in the jail. The spirit in jail was very high; we sang songs, we drew a chessboard on the floor, took cigarette butts, made pieces and played chess, the guys swapping their favorite stories and told their jokes.

We were let out a few days later on a bail bond, and swept back into the problems in McComb where the balance of the hundred students who had marched out were now being required to fill out a slip saying that they would not participate in any more demonstrations in order to get back in the school. Most of them were refusing to do so, and the community was again in an uproar. Everyday they were going to school, and everyday when they got there they would be asked to sign the slip, and everyday they would march back out. There was TV coverage, newspaper men, everybody was around to see what the kids from McComb were doing. We finally decided to set up make-shift classes for them. We opened up Nonviolent High in McComb. That was pretty funny. We had about fifty to seventy-five kids in a large room trying to break them down with the elements of algebra and geometry, a little English, and even a little French, a little history, I think Deon taught physics and chemistry, and McDew took charge of history, and I did something with math. And then in the morning when we would meet, we would try to meet in a little church there and we'd all do a little singing together. I guess the kids liked that part best. Well, under the circumstances and the conditions and the extreme emotional tensions in the town, we did pretty well. And we carried on our classes for a week or two weeks, until finally we got word from Campbell College in Jackson that they would accept them all and that they would make provisions for them immediately. The word came none too soon, because a few days after all the kids had gone up to Jackson to be students at Campbell College, we were back in jail. And we were standing out the first of 39 to 40 days while we waited to see if the $14,000 appeal bond money could be raised to set us free.

Characteristic of the Mississippi jails is that you sit and rot. There's no program if you're not working, which they wouldn't let us do because they weren't going to have those "uppity niggers" out there on the line with a chance for causing trouble. Nothing to do inside. They give you your meals two or three times a day; they give you your shower one or two times a week; they give you silence or nasty words otherwise. We played chess quite a bit; Hollis, and Curtis and I were in the same cell. I taught Hollis and Curtis how to play and we wrote home and got a couple of books. People would come by and they treated us very well, the Negro people in McComb, while we were in jail: they baked chicken and pies, and they would come down, at first, everyday with something to give us. And they finally cut that out and would only let them down once or twice a week. When they came they would smuggle in letters and we would smuggle out letters, and we had a little underground of information passing back and forth between us and the people in town.

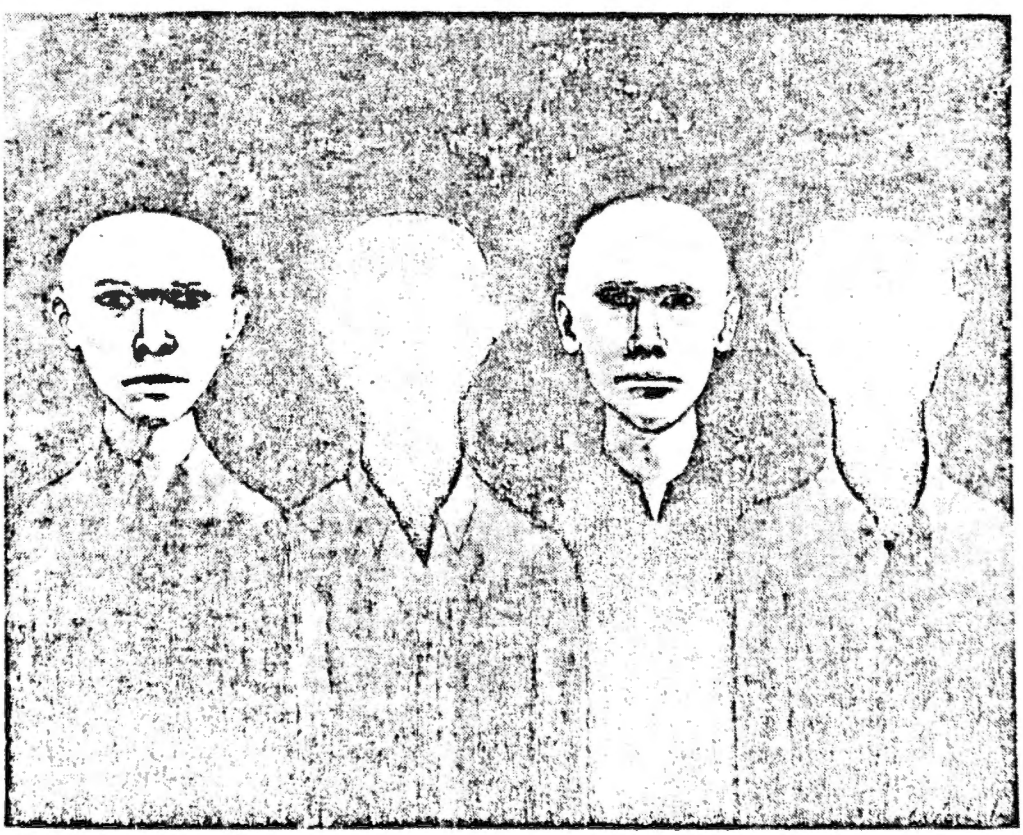
Well, we spent most of the month of November and on into December in jail; we were finally released and the high school kids who were seniors went onto Campbell to school and the rest of us then regrouped to decide what could be done and what projects we needed to carry out next, how we could pick up the pieces. We had, to put it mildly, got our feet wet. We now knew something of what it took to run a voter registration campaign in Mississippi; we knew some of the obstacles we would have to face; we had some general idea of what had to be done to get such a camapaign started. First there were very few agencies available in the Negro community that could act as a vehicle for any sort of campaign. The Negro churches could not in general be counted on; the Negro business leaders could also not in general be counted on except for under-the-cover help; and, in general, anybody who had a specific economic tie-in with

the white community could not be counted on when the pressure got hot. Therefore, our feeling was that the only way to run this campaign was to begin to build a group of young people who would not be responsible economically to any sector of the white community and who would be able to act as free agents. And we began to set about doing this. In most cases it was a conjunction between the young people and some indigenous farmers, independent people, or some courageous businessman able to stick his neck out, or willing to stick his neck out, which was the combination which worked in the voter registration drive.

Curtis Hayes and Hollis Watkins were the first two to start such drives. They worked down at Hattiesburg in the spring of 1962 at our first attempt at setting up voter registration drives around the state. Most of the winter was lean, we were just hanging on in Jackson. It is true that we participated in some of the political campaigns involving Reverend Smith and also Reverend Lindsey and Reverend Trumall and it's true that we made many trips back and forth to the areas where we had been and trips around into the southwestern part of Mississippi, Natchez, Port Gibson and Clayborn digging up material, laying foundations, beginning to get ready for the next drive next summer.

Summer came and we outlined the program whereby we would be working in about five or six counties, most of them in the delta area of Mississippi, in Washington where Greenville is located, in Coahoma where Clarksdale is located, in Sunflower where Ruleville and Indianola are, in Bolivar where Cleveland is, in Laflore where Greenwood is, and in Marshall County where Holly Springs and Les College are. We began these programs in the summer. We first had a week of orientation and workshops at the Highlander Folk School, and Miles Horton opened up his school for us and gave the benefit of his experience to the kids who were going to work that summer in the voter registration program. When we came back from there, the kids began working, most all of them from Mississippi and most all of them people we had recruited that spring in these various towns. They had some success in some and weren't so successful in others.

The drives can be separated out in those counties where you encountered physical and economic reprisals and those counties where you encountered fear, psychological fear, and a great, great deal of immobility on the part of the Negroes. So that in Greenville and Washington County and in Coahoma and Clarksdale they got some results, they got some people to go down. But the kind of operation there was day-to-day drudgery, going around in the hot sun, talking to people, trying to get them to overcome their fear, trying to convince them that nothing would happen to them if they went down, that their houses wouldn't be bombed, that they would not be shot at, that they would not lose their jobs. In the other counties, we couldn't convince people of these things because for one, it wasn't true. In Sunflower and LaFlore counties which are the center of the core of the problem in Mississippi, indeed, I think, for much of the



THE GAME

South, you ran into quite different situations. More like the situations we ran into in Amite and Walthall last summer. These two counties, one where the Citizen's Council first was formed at Sunflower where Indianola is the county seat, and housed the first meeting of the White Citizen's Council. And the other, LaFlore, where Greenwood is the county seat, where the Citizen's Council finds its home and has its mailing address, for the state of Mississippi much of the very racial leadership and much of the very, very conservative and reactionary leadership. Sunflower County is the home of Senator Eastland, and it was this county where we got our first reactions of arrests and then later got shootings and violence.

However, it was in LaFlore County where we got our first real scare. Sam Block was working in LaFlore County. And he began his work there with a voter registration drive organized around a police brutality case. Shortly after he arrived the police had picked up a young fellow, Milton McSwine, 14 years old. Somebody had been peeking into some white lady's house and that somebody had been some young Negro, and the police were out looking and picked up Milton McSwine and accused him of doing it. They took him back to the police station where they stripped him and beat him with their bullwhips until knots and whelts were raised on his thighs and until his screams attracted a postal employee working next door, who was a Negro, late at night. The next morning Sam found out about the case when the fellow was released, had his pictures taken, had affidavits made and reported the case to the Justice Department and then to the FBI. It set the tone for the voter registration project in Greenwood; from then on it was Sam vs. the police. Sam had some success in carrying people down. He took down about 20-25 people, I think, in his first two weeks. And then finally one day when we carried people down, the newspapers gave us a big play. We took about 25 people down that day. And the CBS people were down taking pictures; they had some kind of station wagon set up with a hidden camera, and they were trying to photograph the voter registration operation in practice. That night it appeared in the local papers, big headlines saying, "Voter Registration Drive in Progress" and letting the white citizens in town know that there was actually a voter reigstration drive being organized in Greenwood, that they were holding their offices at 616 Avenue I, and that young students, "outside agitators", as they say, even though Sam comes from Cleveland, Mississippi, which is about 30 miles away, were in Greenwood stirring up their niggers. The next night I got a phone call about 12 o'clock. The operator said it was a collect call from Greenwood, Mississippi. When I took it, I found out it was Sam Block on the line. Sam said that there was some people outside, police cars, about 12 o'clock at night, he didn't know what they were there for. Said that there was also white people riding up and down the street, and that they felt something was going to happen. I told him to keep in touch with us, hung up, called the Justice Department. We had to track down a member of the Justice Department or staff of the Justice Department at his home

and explained to him what was happening. He told us to try and keep in touch with Sam; we gave him Sam's number and he had some instructions about calling the local FBI. Sam called back again: the police were gone and white people had come in their cars, were standing outside the office. He was crouched in the office looking out the window, talking on the phone in a very hushed voice, describing people downstairs with guns and chains, milling around down outside his office. He had to hang up, said he had to leave. We didn't know what to do then, we were over in Cleveland, Mississippi

about an hour's drive away. By that time it was about 1:30 in the morning. Willy Peacock and I then decided to drive over to Greenwood. We got there about 3:30 or 4:00, the office was empty, the door was knocked down, the window was up, Sam was gone, so was Giat and Lavonne. Well, the next morning when they came in, they told us what had happened. People had charged up the back of the stairs, had come into the office, they had escaped out the window across the roof of the adjoining building, down a TV antenna, and on into somebody else's home.

Shortly after that the person they were renting the office from was charged with bigamy, and they had to move. You have to understand that in Mississippi it is probably easier for a Negro to get another wife than it is for him to get a divorce. In the first place, there are only three Negro lawyers in the whole state, and they are all in Jackson. In the second place, the white people probably don't care very much for the Negroes to get divorces, and don't encourage them to get one at all; it fits their conception of the Negro for him to have to live with another wife after he has left his first wife without getting a legal divorce. This was the first case, in any case, that we had heard of a Negro being charged with bigamy. There was no doubt in my mind that it was done so on account of voter registration. However, we couldn't prove this, and his only course was to sever any connection that he had with the voter registration drive and convince the local people that he was clean. This he did, and we moved out of the office.

It took approximately five months to find another office in Greenwood, Mississippi. But now, just a couple of weeks ago, Sam and Willie, who stayed on to work, have an office, and are back in business again. During that time they carried on essentially what I consider, holding operations. That is, they stayed in town, they told the white people, in effect, that we were not going to move, they showed up everyday doing their work, that is, going around and visiting people, breaking down the psychological feeling on the part of the Negroes that these boys were just coming in here, that they're going to be here for a short time, and then they are going to leave, and we're going to be left holding the bag. Because it's very important that the Negroes in the community feel that you're coming in there to stay, work with them and live with them, and that you're going to ride through whatever trouble arrives. And in general, the deeper the fear, the deeper the problems in the community, the longer you have to stay to convince them. So far this month, Sam and Willie have been there taking a few down, a couple here, a couple there, done a lot of talking, showing up around the community, and let the people know that the voter registration drive was continuing. And in the past week, the voter registration drive launched under a food relief program, they processed over a thousand applications, which are providing them with people who will eventually be going down and attempting to register to vote.

In Sunflower, Senator Eastland's home county, the pattern was a little different. In Indianola where we went around the end of August to first try and canvass and get the people to come out there and join the people from Ruleville in attempting to register, we were arrested for passing out leaflets without a permit. Well, that curtailed our movement in Indianola for a good four or five months, primarily because we couldn't afford the money for bail-bond, we didn't have the money for lawyer's fees, and we couldn't afford, at that time, to stay in jail and still get our voter registration program going. Only recently has the Justice Department received word that the people in Indianola are going to release us of those charges, and therefore do we feel free to go back in.

In the meantime, the situation in Sunflower County rapidly came to a head. Following the arrests and the bringing down of a whole busload of people from Ruleville, there was a shooting in Ruleville around September 10. I remember we were in Jackson that night. We had a phone call from Charlie Cobb, and the first thing we had to do was tell him, "OK, now Charlie, calm down." He was talking and talking and we couldn't understand a word he was saying. Finally he slowed down and he told us that there had been a shooting, that two girls who were sitting in his sister's home had been shot, he didn't know who they were, and he was standing in the home right now, that there was blood on the floor, that the mayor was there, and that the sheriff was coming in. We asked him to hang up and try and find out the names of the two girls, and then called on and relayed the information to the Justice Department. We left Jackson about 2 in the morning to drive up to Cleveland so that we got over to Ruleville the first thing the next morning. The car we were driving was in bad condition and we couldn't slow down under 30 miles an hour because the car would stop, and in fact, at one point along the way, near Yazoo City, we did stop, and had to get a push in order to kick off again. This meant that we had to change drivers while we were driving, and added to the general fatigue and nervousness. Finally, all of us fell asleep in the car, including the driver. And outside of Belzoni, to add to all our troubles, we plunged straight off the road where there was a 90 degree curve, not making it, through a road sign, and settled down into somebody's cottonfield. Luckily, none of us were seriously injured, or even killed for that matter. Another car was following behind us, we took all of our things out of the car and piled them in the other one, and made on our way to Cleveland, rather shooken, got into Cleveland early the next morning.

Well, we went over to Ruleville and took a look at the scene of the shooting, but there wasn't much we could do. Charlie Cobb who had called us the night before had been arrested, he had been accused of doing the shooting himself, and had spent the night in jail with the mosquitoes, which he told us, were very friendly that night. The sheriff chased us away from the scene of the shooting threatening us with arrest if we didn't stop, because we were interfering with his investigation. So, we left and went up to Clarksdale, where I found out that since the car we had been driving the night before was in my name, the sheriff in Humphreys County where Belzoni is located which is a notorious city, had a warrant out for my arrest on four counts. Reckless driving and some other things. ■