

Beating of CORE Worker,
Richard A. Jewett, in
Jackson, Mississippi, Jail
March 30, 1964

My name is Richard A. Jewett. My home address is 124 West 81 Street, New York 24, New York. I have been in Mississippi working for CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality) since mid-January, 1964. During this space of time from mid-January to the end of March I have been working in Canton on voter registration.

On Monday, March 30, 1964, I left the COFO (Council of Federated Organizations) office at 1017 Lynch Street, Jackson, at about 6:30 p.m. and went out to eat dinner. I went with another worker, Miss Helen O'Neal. We went to a place up the street, called Smackover's, where we sat and had a leisurely dinner, including several cups of coffee. Neither of us had any sort of alcoholic beverage before, during, or after the meal.

After the meal was over we went across the street to a drug store where each of us bought one or two personal items such as a toothbrush, pencils, filling a prescription, and the like. We were in the drugstore for approximately fifteen minutes.

We left the drugstore and started to walk back to the COFO office. We were walking side by side on the sidewalk. We were on the north side of Lynch Street and were walking east. By this time it was dark outside, and the time was approximately 7:30 p.m. or 7:45 p.m. Just after walking by the Masonic Temple at 1072 Lynch Street we passed by a police prisoner van. Parked just behind the van was a police car with four policemen sitting inside. We walked by the car, glancing inside but not stopping or paying special attention to it.

After we had walked perhaps twenty steps beyond the police car we heard a call of "Hey!" behind us. We turned around and started back when one of the officers motioned to us. As we reached the officer who had called us (He was out of the car and standing on the sidewalk; all of the other officers remained in the car.), the officer asked me what I had been drinking. I replied, "Nothing." The officer said something like "nonsense" and then, "Come along with me." I gave a package I was carrying to Miss O'Neal, who then walked off towards the COFO office.

The officer opened up the back door of the police prisoner van, a sort of panel truck with wire mesh across the windows in back and benches on both sides and in the front of the back compartment. I climbed in and sat down on one of the side benches. The back door was then closed behind me and locked with a padlock on the outside. Two officers climbed in the front seat of the van; I could see them through a mesh-covered window that looked through from my compartment into the front

seat of the van. The van was then driven to the Jackson Police Station, the police car following close behind. Once or twice the van stopped short for no apparent reason, and I was thrown towards the front of the compartment. I learned to hold tight to the bench to prevent anything serious from happening.

When the two vehicles reached the basement of the city jail, the padlock was unlocked and I stepped down and started to walk with the officers towards the elevator. Inside the elevator the light was switched off by the officer pressing the buttons for the floors. The light was not turned on again until we reached the floor towards which we were headed.

When we reached the room where I was booked I was asked to stand in front of a desk on which there were two typewriters. A form was inserted into one of the typewriters, and a series of questions were asked me. These questions -- name, address, name of mother, name of father, date of birth, and the like -- were the same questions asked of me when I had previously entered the Jackson city jail, so I believe the questions were all part of the form.

After the form had been completed, the officers started asking other questions. They asked who I worked for, how much money I made, when I got paid -- all of which I answered. They then asked what my wife thought of my dating a Negro girl -- which I did not answer. They asked several other questions which I do not remember, then they asked if I would deny if I was a Communist. I said that my political beliefs were not pertinent to the charges being placed against me and that I would not answer any questions about my political beliefs. Right after this one of the officers started to hit me.

The officer was standing behind me. We had moved to a desk on another side of the room where my pockets had been emptied and several questions had been asked about the contents of my pockets. Comments were made about how much money I had (about \$20) and about a sheet of paper -- very old and crinkled -- with The Movement written across the top and a list of names on it. The officers at one point had asked how long I had been here and I had replied two months. One of the officers said he didn't believe me, that he had ridden up and down Lynch Street many times but had never seen me. After this business with the pockets we had moved back to the desk with the typewriters, and the officers were arranged with two behind me and two in front of me.

The officer who began to hit me was standing behind me. He raised his arm and came down with the side of his hand across my neck. He repeated this motion about half a dozen times, each time striking hard. I gave under each blow but straightened up for the succeeding one. As he hit me the first time he said something like "Nigger-lover" but said nothing for each of the other blows.

After these blows, the officer turned me slightly towards him and started to hit me in the body and stomach and face with his fists. As he did this he forced me back the six or eight feet across the room until I was against the wall. He then took my head in one of his hands and slammed my head against the wall two or three times. After this he pulled me forward and forced me to the ground. While I was on the ground he kicked me several times in the stomach and chest.

I then got up, and he started hitting me on the body again with his fists. He also kicked up with his leg several times and kicked me in the stomach. After this he walked into one of the other rooms off the booking room.

At one point another officer joined in the hitting, but he did very little. The two remaining officers simply looked on the whole time.

The officer who had administered most of the beating came back out of the side room very soon. He was breathing very hard. At this point the officers looked at me and mumbled something about resisting arrest and nodded to each other. I had resumed my position in front of the table with the typewriters. As the officer who had done the hitting typed out something I noticed his name-plate; it read EARL GUESS. I did not notice the names of any of the other officers.

I would estimate that the whole beating took from 30 to 45 seconds.

Shortly after this the jailer came into the room and led me off to my cell. I was kept by myself in one of the investigation cells overlooking the Hinds County Courthouse.

Several of the trustees (Negro) who serviced the cell spoke to me during the next two days that I was there. They asked if I were the fellow who was beaten in the booking room on Monday night. When I replied that I was, they asked why. I said that I was a civil rights worker. Several of the people told me in turn about how they had been beaten when they had come in.

At my trial my lawyer, Mr. Jess Brown, spoke with the prosecuting attorney. I pled nolo contendere, and fines against me of \$15 on one count, \$25 on another count, and 30 days suspended sentence on the third count were levied. The three counts were drunkenness, resisting arrest, and vagrancy. I believe the two fines were for drunkenness and resisting arrest, the suspended sentence for vagrancy; but there was a mixup at the trial and I do not know.

I served two days in the County Jail before money came to pay my fines and release me.