

CHIEF BROOM

My name is Rueben Brown; I am 15 years old and live in Biloxi. I have been actively working with the COFO project all summer. I am Negro.

On August 5, 1964, I was in Ocean Springs working on voter registration. At about 3:15 P.M., I was at the place where the Freedom School is being held, on the lawn of a local Negro woman. The Chief of Police, Mr. Broom, came over and began listening to one of the students reading. He then gave a hostile and insistent speech about how Negroes are treated so well in Ocean Springs, and that they have been voting all their lives. He quoted from the Bible to the effect that all is as intended. There was some discussion between the students and COFO workers and the Chief. I just walked away from the discussion and this got the Chief angry, so he arrested me. I asked him what the charges were, and he said that I called him a liar. Actually I had just disagreed with him in the discussion. While I was sitting in the police car, I asked the Chief if I could call my lawyer. This got him pretty excited, and he offered to let me go if I promised not to cause any more trouble. I did not promise to be good, so we went down to the police station.

When we got down to the station, more cops talked to me and asked questions. I persisted in asking for the charge, and they replied, "We will find a charge." All the while they were talking to me about integrating Ocean Springs high school. I told them about voting rights and Negro history. I overheard some of the cops talking about calling Roger Seymour's father to apply pressure within the Negro community. Roger is an Ocean Springs boy who is now working actively with COFO.

Finally they decided that they could not hold me on anything, so they told me to get going. As I was getting into the car of ~~another~~ another COFO worker to leave, I yelled across the street to a third COFO worker that they couldn't hold me. After hearing this, one of the cops yelled to another that they should hit me on head with the billy club.

While all this was going on, the cops were getting more and more belligerent towards all of the COFO people who were at the station. They were trying to scare us, and were talking very abusively. A small crowd of white guys had gathered, and the cops, including Chief Broom, told the white boys that it would be alright if they beat us up. One of the boys tried to start a fight with John Rich, a COFO worker.

The Chief told us that if we tried to hold another Freedom School session we would all be arrested. We did hold the school and nothing happened.

Rueben Brown