

Excerpts from
'Troublemaker' Memories of the Freedom Movement
Grenada Mississippi 1966

Contents:

A Century From Freedom ~ 1966.....	1
Machine Guns & Draft Cards ~ 1966.....	5
On the Square ~ 1966.....	9
Faulkner Nailed It ~ 1966.....	16
Battle for the Ballot ~ 1966.....	18
A Mississippi Trial ~ 1966.....	26
The School Crisis ~ 1966.....	31
Mob Terror & the Courage of Children ~ 1966.....	36
Grappling With Poverty ~ 1966.....	44
Grit & Determination ~ 1966.....	50
Grenada Today ~ 2018.....	57
And a Song Shall Rise.....	59

A Century From Freedom ~ 1966

Before I-55 was completed, U.S. Highway 51 was the main highway between Jackson and Memphis. Halfway between those two cities is the town of Grenada, the seat of Grenada County. The county's western side dips down into the rich, flat cotton country of the Mississippi Delta while the hilly eastern portion is partially flooded by Grenada Lake. Local lore had it that both were named after the province and city in Spain, but folk pronounced the names more like the hand-thrown military weapon than any location named in Spanish geography.

Grenada had always been a segregation stronghold. In May of 1966, both town and county still lived as if it were 1866. Blacks still sat at the rear of the Greyhound buses that briefly paused each day at the depot. In flagrant violation of the Civil Rights Act, Afro-Americans were not permitted to enter the library at all. Nor could they eat at the white diners or lunch counters. White women worked behind the desks and cash registers of downtown Grenada, Negro women pushed mops and scrubbed toilets in the homes of their white employers.

Over the previous century there had been a number of racial lynchings — four in one day in 1885. Fear still ruled the Afro-American community and Blacks didn't get "uppity" in Grenada, not if they wanted to survive, not if they wanted to stay. For Afro-Americans, society was still ruled by the edict of Supreme Court Justice Roger Taney in the infamous 1857 Dred Scott decision that, *a negro of the African race had no rights which a white man was bound to respect.*

A Black man risked a beating, arrest on a trumped-up charge, or even death if he looked a white man in the eye, questioned or challenged a white person in authority, or simply failed to step off the sidewalk into the gutter to let a white woman pass by. And Black women lived with the daily knowledge that under the southern doctrine of "paramour rights" white men could sexually assault them with impunity.

Though its population was barely 18,000, like all Mississippi counties Grenada was large enough to contain two separate and distinct worlds — one Black, one white. About 8,000 people lived in Grenada town. Most of the city's land was occupied by whites and their white world was one of paved, tree-shaded streets with sidewalks, lush green lawns, and red-brick homes. Grenada's Afro-American population lived on the periphery, mostly on the north and west edges with a smaller isolated district on the east side. Their Black world was one of dirt lanes — dusty in the summer, muddy in the winter — with small weather-beaten "shotgun" shacks jam-crammed side by side on every square inch of available land. No lawns, no sidewalks, no streetlights, no sewers, and no storm drains.

With many Afro-American adults gone north to seek work, whites had a slim 51-49% majority in the county and a similar narrow margin in town. But the Black population was skewed towards children too young to vote and the elderly too old to get to the polls or too poor to pay the poll tax, so even if Afro-Americans were allowed to register without difficulty whites would still have a solid 57-43% voting edge. In actuality, few Blacks were allowed to register, and fewer still dared show up at a polling place to cast a ballot. Of 4323 Afro-Americans eligible to vote in 1961, only 61 (1.4%) were registered, while 95% of the 5792 whites were listed on the voting rolls.

In 1966, almost everyone in Grenada County was born and raised in the area. People seeking economic opportunity migrated out and almost no one moved in. Poverty was deep and widespread. Only half the population had steady year-round jobs — mostly related to agriculture. The federal "poverty line" for a family of four was an annual income of \$3300 or less (equal to a bit over \$25,000 in 2018). The median income for Black families was \$1400 (equal to about \$11,600 in 2018), less than half the official poverty rate, meaning that the great majority of Afro-Americans lived in poverty. For whites, the median income was around \$4300 (equal about \$38,000 in 2018), putting the great majority of them well above the poverty line.

There had never been much significant Civil Rights Movement activity in the county; it was considered too tough a nut to crack. Freedom Summer did not touch Grenada because no local leader or church could be found to sponsor a project or house a freedom school. The NAACP was moribund and a brief organizing effort by SNCC in 1965 had been swiftly suppressed.

At three o'clock in the afternoon of June 15 — while I was still in Alabama, having not yet been sent to join it — the Meredith Mississippi March Against Fear (and with it, the 20th century) came striding down Highway 51 into Grenada. The white power structure knew it was coming and they had a plan — make soothing promises and see to it that those “outside” marchers had no issues to demonstrate about. They assumed that as in the past their local Afro-Americans would “stay in their place.” As City Manager John McEachin explained to a reporter, “All we want is to get these people through town and out of here. Good niggers don't want anything to do with this march. And there are more good niggers [in Grenada] than sorry niggers.”

[Unlike most Mississippi towns, Grenada had a “city manager” form of government. The City Council hired a professional to run the town and the position of mayor was largely symbolic.]

McEachin's confidence notwithstanding, Grenada whites were bitterly divided over how to contain and kill this Black challenge to white supremacy. One faction — the “hardliners” — remained committed to the traditional methods of jail, police violence, white terrorism, and economic retaliation that had maintained segregation in the Deep South for generations. The other group — the “racial moderates” like McEachin — wanted to avoid actions that might provoke federal intervention, or attract negative attention from outsiders, or risk fanning the flames of resistance. They favored the more sophisticated strategies and tactics of chicanery, misdirection, divide and conquer, and wearing the Freedom Movement down through attrition.

In the short run, McEachin's plan failed — utterly and spectacularly. Grenada's Black community responded to the Meredith March with enormous enthusiasm, greater than any town on the entire route except for Canton a week later. A tidal wave of local Blacks — women, men, young, old — poured out from their shanty shacks to join the march when it turned off Highway 51 and headed up Pearl Street towards the center of town. So many that an amazed state trooper told a reporter that, “about a mile of niggers,” were marching up towards the town square.

Like so many other southern towns, Grenada was built around an open, park-like central green. The streets surrounding the green made up the “downtown” business district — known as the “square” — with stores, offices and public buildings fronting on wide sidewalks. In Grenada's case, the courthouse wasn't located on the green itself but rather across the aptly named Green Street. The park did, however, hold the obligatory Confederate war memorial, a soldier statue on a tall pedestal.

When the Meredith marchers accompanied by hundreds of Black Grenadans reached the square, they held a large voter rally on the green. To a roar of Afro-American approval, Dr. Robert Green of SCLC placed a small

American flag on the Confederate War Memorial statue, saying, "We're tired of seeing rebel flags. Give me the flag of the United States, the flag of freedom!"

Local whites were outraged and aghast at his "defilement" of their sacred memorial to those who had died to maintain slavery. And from the floor of the U.S. Senate the next day, Mississippi Senator James Eastland declared, "I would not be surprised if Martin Luther King and these agitators next desecrate the graves of Confederate soldiers and drag their remains through the streets."

After the rally, Afro-American men and women lined up at the courthouse to become voters. They were registered by four Black registrars who had been temporarily hired by the county under McEachin's "give-them-no-excuse" plan. When the Civil Rights Act had outlawed segregation back in 1964, the courthouse toilet signs had been quickly changed from "White" and "Colored" to "#1" and "#2," though, of course, any Afro-American who dared use #1 would quickly suffer the consequences. Now, while white onlookers and courthouse officials seethed in fury, grinning Black citizens made use of #1 for the first time in their lives.

Later that evening, Fannie Lou Hamer led the mass meeting in freedom songs and Dr. King told them, "Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy." He asked them if they wanted him to return with SCLC when the Meredith March was over. They did.

But after the march and its attendant reporters and TV cameras continued on its way the following day, Grenada reverted to its traditional "southern way of life." The Afro-American registrars were quickly fired and the little American flag placed on the Confederate memorial was torn down by furious whites. The power structure immediately revoked the promises they had made in response to the march, including desegregation of public facilities as required by the Civil Rights Act — a law that clearly had not yet come to Grenada, Mississippi.

Several members of SCLC's field staff, however, remained behind to continue the voter registration drive and help local leaders build an ongoing movement. Within a few days some 1300 Afro-Americans were registered, many times the number of Black voters in the county before the march arrived. It was then discovered that more than 700 of those just registered at the courthouse had been tricked. By some mysterious quirk of local law, all residents of Grenada town had to be given a slip of paper by the registrars at the courthouse which they then had to take to City Hall so that they could vote in city elections. No one had been given those slips, or informed that they had to register twice, so they still had no vote in municipal elections. With the numeric margin of whites narrower in town than in the rural areas, the power structure wanted to be certain there was no chance of any Blacks being elected to city government. When the trick was finally discovered all the city voters had to be re-registered.

Once the Meredith March was deep in the Delta — too far to return — Black SCLC staff members were arrested for the crime of sitting in the “white” section of the Grenada Theater. Police and sheriffs deputies resumed their traditional tactics of intimidation and retaliation and newly registered Afro-American voters were fired from their jobs and evicted from their homes. But by now Grenada's Black community had tasted freedom and they were determined not to back down. In a well-attended mass meeting they voted to form the Grenada County Freedom Movement (GCFM) and affiliate with SCLC. The GCFM was led by Rev. Sharper T. Cunningham and its initial goal was continued voter registration and enforcing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by desegregating those businesses and public facilities that remained “white only.”

When the Meredith March ended in Jackson, I returned to Alabama with Albert Turner and briefly resumed maintaining contact with local leaders in Perry, Hale, and Marengo counties. Over in Mississippi, SCLC sent additional staff into Grenada just as King had promised, including national-level SCLC leaders like Hosea Williams, Andrew Young, and Dr. King himself, who split his time between Grenada and the Chicago Freedom Movement's ferocious battle for open housing.

The conciliatory scheme to ease the Meredith March through town had failed to prevent the eruption of a widespread local challenge to white authority. That failure strengthened the hand of the hard-line group who favored Mississippi's traditional “knock 'em in the head and toss 'em in jail” methods of social control. With the hardliners now back in control, violence and arrests were the order of the day. GCFM efforts were met with adamant opposition from whites determined to return Grenada to the Jim Crow racial order of the past.

On July 4th, SCLC workers and local activists were invited to a barbecue in the rural Sweethome area by an Afro-American woman who was posing as a Movement supporter. After they arrived she called Sheriff Suggs Ingram and had 27 of them arrested for “trespass” in what was obviously a setup. Three days later, a march protesting those arrests was broken up by the cops and more than 40 were arrested for violating a local parade ordinance.

[Throughout the South, such unconstitutional parade ordinances were frequently used to suppress nonviolent protests. The local authorities refused to issue parade permits to civil rights groups and the cops could unilaterally declare that almost any kind of protest was an illegal “parade” — even if everyone was walking by the side of the road or on a sidewalk without blocking any traffic. White officials knew the ordinances would eventually be overturned on Constitutional grounds in the courts, but that would take time during which they hoped to choke off protests and suppress Afro-American freedom aspirations.]

Meanwhile, up in Chicago, SCLC's efforts to end residential segregation were being met by savage violence. Two fierce fires burning simultaneously, one North one South, stretched SCLC staff and finances to the breaking point. With

half the Grenada staff in jail and Chicago an ever-expanding vortex of protest and violence, SCLC headquarters in Atlanta sent out a call for reinforcements. I volunteered for transfer to Grenada and arrived late on Friday, July 8th.

J.T. Johnson was SCLC's Grenada Project Director. He was in command when Executive Staff members like Hosea Williams or Andrew Young were not in town. At that time, the number of SCLC field staff assigned to Grenada fluctuated between 10 and 15 or so, most of them Afro-American with 3 or 4 whites — now including me.

Machine Guns & Draft Cards ~ 1966

My first full day in Grenada was Saturday, July 9th.

Mass meetings were usually held in Belle Flower Missionary Baptist Church on Pearl Street, a stone's throw from Highway 51. Belle Flower (sometimes referred to as Belle Flowers, Bell Flowers or Bellflower) was said to be the third oldest Black church in Mississippi. The meeting that afternoon voted to begin an "integrate everything" campaign to make Grenada an "open city." To that end they adopted 51 demands including desegregation of public facilities, Afro-American voter registrars with neighborhood and evening registration, and equal employment by government and private businesses. *

Teams composed mainly of high school students were sent to test Civil Rights Act compliance at diners, motels, the library, and the municipal swimming pool. Most places complied with the law, but the pool was permanently closed rather than permit Black kids to swim with white kids.

The open city campaign continued for weeks with integration testing and lawsuits filed under the Civil Rights Act against non-complying establishments. The swimming pool remained closed because the thought of white girls and Black boys in close proximity to each other while wearing nothing but swimsuits was simply unacceptable to white adults. Other than that, the campaign was largely successful — at least in the technical sense that Blacks willing to defy white hostility and the threat of later retaliation could ask for, and receive, service at most establishments without being arrested. As a practical matter, however, most Afro-Americans chose not to run such risks so the customs of race segregation in Grenada remained largely — though not entirely — intact.

Later that afternoon, I was standing near the church when a pickup truck drove up and one of the two guys inside opened fire with a machine gun. As trained, I instantly dropped to the dirt. His targets were two other Freedom

* See www.crmvet.org/docs/grendocs.htm for the text of the 51 demands and other documents and reports from the Grenada Freedom Movement of 1966.

Movement activists and a Justice Department official. The car they were standing next to was shot full of holes but they managed to dive to the ground in the nick of time and were not hit. The shooter was arrested a few blocks away — but only on a minor unrelated charge rather than assault with a deadly weapon. An all-white jury later acquitted him.

That evening a pair of FBI agents asked to meet with me. I assumed, of course, that they wanted to know what I had witnessed regarding the attempted assassination of a government official (and, oh yes, a pair of civil rights workers too). As it turned out, the only thing they asked me about was my draft status. They demanded to see my draft card. They seemed quite disappointed when they discovered that I had a valid "1Y" classification and that I wasn't a draft dodger on the run who they could apprehend.

Under the Selective Service system in 1966, men with "1A" classifications could be drafted into the army at any time, but those with a "1Y" status like me were essentially exempt. The "1Y" classification was for those "mentally, morally, or physically unfit for combat except in cases of extreme national emergency." In other words, if an invasion fleet of Viet Cong rowboats appeared off the California coast I might be drafted — otherwise not. Since I had never been given either a physical or mental exam I assumed my draft board considered me *morally unfit* to fight in Vietnam — no doubt because of my civil rights arrests.

Unbeknownst to me, however, ten days after my chat with the FBI my Los Angeles draft board suddenly and without explanation decided to reclassify me "1A." The first I learned of it was when I received an order to report for my pre-induction physical — next stop Vietnam! Since they were still sending mail to my old California address where it was forwarded by friends, first to Selma, and then finally to Grenada, I didn't receive their various notices until the dates had passed. Much confusion ensued.

I had no intention of fighting a war I profoundly opposed on both moral and political grounds, so I filed for Conscientious Objector status. Since I was working for Martin Luther King and had supporting letters from people like Andrew Young and Hosea Williams, to say nothing of a thoroughly documented two-year record of advocating, teaching, and practicing nonviolence, I had a good case — which I eventually won.

The timing, though, was striking. I had been classified "1Y" in September of 1964, no doubt because of my arrests at the Van de Kamp's protests. I continued my Freedom Movement activity over the following two years with more arrests in Selma. Clearly there had been no noticeable change in my "immoral" behavior. Then, just ten days after the FBI interrogated me about my draft status rather than the shooting they were supposed to be investigating, my draft board reclassified me "1A" without explanation. Under the Selective Service rules, had I known about the reclassification I would have had ten days

to appeal it. Precisely ten days after being reclassified "1A," I was called up for induction. What a marvel of bureaucratic efficiency!

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's obsessive racism was by now well known to everyone active in the Freedom Movement. His bureau was a segregated, white-only institution that employed not a single Black, Brown, Asian, or Native American agent. His open hostility to the Civil Rights Movement was notorious, as was the explicit racism and support for segregation evinced by many southern FBI agents who worked hand-in-glove with local law enforcement and the White Citizens' Councils.

Across the South in 1966, men who were active in the Freedom Movement were being drafted into the military as a way of removing them from the communities they were organizing. So the feeb's action in my case was part of that broader pattern of anti-civil-rights racism and using the draft to cripple the Movement. And on a personal level, it reminded me of how they used to follow my parents from job to job informing employers about the dangerous "reds" they had on the payroll, which would then result in immediate termination.

Decades later I obtained my FBI file through the Freedom of Information Act but all the pertinent information was blacked out, so I can't prove that the FBI reached out to Draft Board 102 with a "suggestion" that they reclassify and draft me forthwith. I can't prove it, but I believe it.

Sunday the 10th was my second day in Grenada. After church, we protested the attempted murders with a support rally in front of the county jail where those who had been arrested on the July 7 march were still incarcerated. Since the unconstitutional parade ordinance still barred marches, we "drifted" downtown in small groups from Belle Flower church six blocks away. When the signal was given, about 50 of us quickly gathered on the lawn around the flagpole flying the "stars and bars" of the Mississippi state flag and commenced singing freedom songs as loud as we could so the prisoners inside could hear us and know we hadn't forgotten them. The jail was adjacent to the northside Black neighborhood and about 250 Afro-Americans observed our action with smiles and indications of support.

As was normal throughout the South, Black kids too young to risk arrest as demonstrators acted as freedom scouts. They soon reported that a force of Mississippi State Troopers in full riot gear were forming up behind the courthouse across the street, so we quickly ended our rally. Most of the protesters retreated to the church while a few merged with the bystanders. Some of us from SCLC dodged into a neighboring building and up to the second floor where from windows we could observe the scene.

When the troopers charged around the corner there were no demonstrators to arrest or assault. Clearly disappointed, they turned on the crowd of Afro-American onlookers, brutally beating them with rifle butts and chasing them in

all directions. As had been the case in Canton, troopers seemed to prefer beating people with their rifles and shotguns while city cops and sheriffs favored the more traditional billy clubs — a pattern we experienced often in the months to come.

Up on the second floor we crouched down, peeking out the windows. Well, the Black SCLC staff members did. They didn't want me to do so because the sight of a white face at the window of an Afro-American building would give away our position and the cops would come charging in after us. I understood that, yet I couldn't prevent myself from attempting to grab a quick look at what was happening. Fortunately, the other staff members instantly pulled me back. We had to wait more than an hour for the coast to clear.

On the Square ~ 1966

Though it had been in existence for less than a month, the Grenada County Freedom Movement (GCFM) had already established a tradition of daily mass meetings in Belle Flower Baptist Church, usually in the evening. At that night's meeting, a "blackout" (boycott) of Grenada's white merchants was announced to protest the arrests and beatings and to enforce the 51 demands.

Throughout the South, Afro-American boycotts of white-owned stores had proven to be one of the most effective Freedom Movement strategies. In rural counties like Grenada where few Blacks owned cars, Afro-Americans were more likely to shop locally than the more affluent whites who could drive to larger urban centers where selection was greater and prices lower. By the same token though, the lack of market alternatives made boycotts hard to sustain by poor Blacks who had to obtain food and clothing for their families, so they were not undertaken lightly.

The next day in Oxford, Mississippi, some 50 miles to the north, federal district Judge Claude Clayton declared that the "parade ordinance" was unconstitutional — a victory that elated us. We began sending small teams of three or four people to picket the downtown stores, and that afternoon the white power structure published our 51 demands in the local paper with a statement that claimed no one in Grenada discriminated (heaven forbid) and then declared: "Demands, threats and intimidation are not proper, appropriate, or acceptable means of accomplishing anything, and any and all such tactics will be ignored. There will be no concessions of any type whatsoever, likewise there will be no acceding to any such demands."

On the following day, Wednesday the 13th, with the "parade ordinance" now overturned, a large picket line was sent downtown to enforce the blackout. All 45 pickets, including a couple SCLC staff, were arrested for some reason that

was never clearly explained. As with the Queen of Hearts from *Alice in Wonderland*, in Mississippi the rule was "arrest first, figure out charges later."

SCLC was still paying off the costs of the Meredith March and didn't have much money for bail, so the idea of large picket lines was shelved in favor of small picket teams. Small groups were more vulnerable to attack or harassment by hostile whites but less likely to be arrested, and if they were busted fewer needed to be bailed out.

Because of their vulnerability to white violence, small picket teams were deemed too dangerous for white SCLC staff members like me. Grenada whites considered us to be "commie race traitors," and our presence on a small boycott line would provoke them to violence which would result in the pickets being busted for "disturbing the peace." So J.T. took me off picket duty and assigned R.B. Cottonreader, an Afro-American staff member, to coordinate and lead the pickets while the rest of us — both Black and white — canvassed door-to-door in the Black community.

On Thursday the 14th we urged people to attend a special afternoon mass meeting and then join a mass march — the first since the "parade ordinance" had been overturned. The mass meeting was well attended, and more than 200 people joined the march up to the square led by Hosea Williams of SCLC. By big-city standards, 200 people may not sound like much, but in a small rural town with only a few thousand Afro-Americans of high school age or older, for that many to defy a century of social conditioning and the very real threats of economic retaliation, police repression, and Klan violence was significant.

Within the GCFM, the formal leadership positions were all held by men though much of the actual leadership *work* was done by women out of the public spotlight. Male leaders, both local and SCLC, led the marches, but women and children formed the bulk of the protesters. Most of those marching were high school students, with girls outnumbering the boys.

While enraged whites might spontaneously assault a small picket line of a few protesters, the social psychology of crowds meant that mass marches were — for the most part — only vulnerable to attack by large mobs incited to violence by Klan or Council leaders with the cooperation, or at least acquiescence, of the cops and courts. So white activists like me were allowed to participate in marches even though we were barred from small pickets.

Two by two we marched on the side of the road (no sidewalks in the Black community) so as not to be accused of blocking traffic. I was assigned as a march marshal to the rear of the column. My job was to move up and down alongside my portion of the line, keeping people caught up and being on the lookout for trouble. Since protest actions with as few as 40 or 50 participants had resulted in arrests, we were all tense, expecting to be jumped at any moment by cops or Klan, but nothing untoward occurred.

When we reached the square and entered onto the green we discovered that a dozen or so Black inmates from Parchman Farm prison had been brought in to prevent us from again "desecrating" the holy statue. Parchman was justifiably notorious as one of the most brutal penitentiaries in the nation, and under the hard-eyed watch of heavily armed white deputies, the prisoners stood shoulder to shoulder around the pedestal, obviously under orders to attack any protester who approached. White officials and cops were present in force, grinning and joking. They clearly relished the symbolism of Black prisoners beating Afro-American protesters to defend a memorial to Confederate soldiers who had died fighting to maintain slavery.

For our part, we all understood the terrible punishments that those inmates would suffer if they failed to violently prevent us from "defiling" the statue with another American flag — or with merely the vile touch of an Afro-American protester. SCLC leader Hosea Williams cautioned us to leave them alone and we held our rally well away from the memorial and its coerced defenders.

That was the first march in Grenada that wasn't blocked or smashed by the cops since June 15 when the Meredith March had passed through. In that sense it was a victory. But I was so furious at the tactics of the white officials — so typical of the vicious, petty cruelty inherent in white supremacy and segregation — that it didn't feel like any kind of accomplishment.

The white power structure's use of Parchman prisoners to guard the statue was reported in the northern press with condemnation and ridicule. After a couple more marches they stopped using the prisoners and we held many of our rallies near the monument. But knowing they would bring the inmates back, and not wanting to place them in a such a cruel position, we chose not to actively "defile" it with American flags.

When our rally ended, Black Grenadans lined up to register to vote at the courthouse across the street. But Sheriff Suggs Ingram refused to let more than three at a time enter the building. Whites were not subject to any such rules, they could enter and leave freely. Since small Afro-American groups were vulnerable to arrest, attack, and intimidation GCFM leaders rejected his demand. No one entered the courthouse and no one was registered.

The next day we held a similar afternoon march, and that evening after the mass meeting in Belle Flower we staged a dangerous night march up to the square and then through the northside Afro-American neighborhood. We started with about 250 marchers, others joined us along the way, and there were more than 600 by the time we rallied outside the Chat & Chew Cafe on Union Street. That soon became our normal custom: different kinds of Movement activity during the day such as boycott leafleting and picketing, door-to-door organizing, workshops and training, then an evening mass meeting and a night march to the square with a rally at the courthouse or on the green. Sometimes

followed by marching through the Black neighborhood with another rally on Union Street.

The Chat & Chew was the only Afro-American-owned cafe in the northside Black community and therefore the only safe place for white civil rights workers. There were a couple of Afro-American eating establishments in the downtown area, but the first time I tried to grab a bite at one of them I was spotted through the window by angry whites on the street and had to escape out the back way as they gathered to come in and drag me out for an old-fashioned southern whupping.

Chat's was in an old wooden building with warped plank floors. They had pretty decent burgers, but their real speciality was deep-fried catfish sandwiches, which were really good. I'd never eaten catfish before, but commercial catfish ponds were beginning to replace some of the Delta cotton patches and it was becoming a low-cost food staple across the state.

Over the next week, downtown boycott pickets continued to be harassed and sometimes arrested, but our marches were not interfered with. There were still a dozen or more members of the SCLC field staff permanently assigned to Grenada but that was barely enough to keep up with the work. For the most part, local students handled the picketing, sometimes with the help of SCLC organizer R.B. Cottonreader, but often on their own. Since I mainly did door-to-door canvassing for the mass meetings and voter registration, I wasn't arrested. Which was fine by me, I had already enjoyed the hospitality of the southern penal system in Selma, Alabama and that had been quite sufficient.

By now I was being hosted by an Afro-American woman in her small wood-plank home on Newsome Alley around the corner from the Chat & Chew on Union Street. It took a lot of courage for an elderly woman living alone to open her door to a freedom worker. She let me use the little room that her children had once occupied, and I slept on an old iron-frame bed with a thick feather mattress in a muslin cover. Each morning she fed me breakfast of grits, bacon, and biscuits & gravy, and if I hadn't had dinner by the time I returned in the evening she always warmed something up, so I never went to bed hungry.

On Friday, July 22nd, the federal judge in Oxford ruled in our favor, issuing a sweeping injunction commanding the white power structure to accept that Afro-Americans had First Amendment rights, ordering the cops to stop interfering with legal protests, and instructing them to protect demonstrators from terrorist attacks by the Klan and other racists.

Included in his injunction were rules of conduct that *we* had to obey. He required us to march two by two on the side of the road or on sidewalks and obey all traffic rules. He also ordered us to break our marches into sections of 20 people with 20 feet between each group. Since we had to obey traffic rules anyway, the additional public benefit of the groups-of-20 rule eluded us, but we generally

followed it — except when we had to close up tight for self-protection against mob attack.

Grenada's white community reacted to Clayton's ruling with raging fury. It was hard to tell who they hated more, the "damn Yankee" federal government daring to tell them how to treat their "nigrahs," or us racial troublemakers challenging the tranquility of their Jim Crow "southern way of life." The judge and other federals, however, were distant targets, well protected by armed law enforcement. We, however, were near at hand — and nonviolent.

In anticipation of our Saturday night march on the 23rd, more than 700 angry whites gathered on the square, visibly ready to attack us with baseball bats, chains, and steel pipes. We figured that some of them probably carried concealed knives and guns. Our young scouts reported that, judging by license plates, several carloads had come in from Klan strongholds like Neshoba County and the Pearl River area in the Southwest corner of the state. Large mobs like that don't form spontaneously. Someone with political clout has to organize and mobilize them, but no one was claiming responsibility. And by now it was quite clear that county Sheriff Suggs Ingram had no intention of protecting us from his white constituents. Not that night. Not ever.

The normal Mississippi practice was to station one or two state troopers in each rural county, but since the beginning of the month the Grenada contingent had been reinforced to a couple dozen troopers in order to suppress protests and enforce the recently overturned "parade ordinance." Now under court order to protect rather than attack us, their commander said he had been "caught by surprise" by this "unexpected" hostile mob. He claimed he didn't have enough men to guard us if we marched, but he promised that if we canceled on this night he'd bring in enough reinforcements to protect our marches on the following nights.

We took his promise of future protection with a large grain of salt but agreed not to march that Saturday night. When the white mob realized we weren't going to walk into their ambush they began advancing down Pearl and Cherry Streets toward Belle Flower where we were holding our mass meeting. To their credit, the troopers did hold them a block away so they couldn't attack the church.

On Sunday the 24th, an even bigger mob of whites again gathered on the square to assault our march. Reporters estimated it at over 1,000, armed with bats and clubs. Again the troopers said they didn't have enough men to protect us and again they asked us to cancel the march. No way. We knew that if we let them continue to intimidate us we'd never be able to march again.

About 200 of us strode out of Belle Flower along Pearl Street towards the square (the groups-of-twenty rule made our numbers easy to count). Under Clayton's rules, a few march marshals were exempted from walking two by two

and allowed to patrol up and down the line, so I was in my usual marshal spot, responsible for the three sections at the rear of the column. As a general rule of thumb, when a nonviolent protest march encountered a hostile mob the most dangerous spot was usually the front, because that's where the most enraged assailants would attack first, but rear guard was the next-most vulnerable because, like beasts-of-prey, mobs would often assault a retreating line that they could attack from behind.

Usually we exuberantly sang our freedom songs but on this night we were silent. Silent and scared. Scared but determined. We were welcomed to the square by shouted curses, jeers, and hate-filled epithets. In addition to the enraged cries of "nigger," "nigger-lover," "commies," and of course "race traitors," so familiar to me from Los Angeles and Alabama, there was now a new racist battle cry of "white power!"

We saw only a handful of troopers plus a few cops and deputies who seemed more interested in socializing with members of the mob than restraining them. Instead of crossing the street onto the central green for our usual rally we took the whites by surprise, striding rapidly past the courthouse and then turning right on 1st Street to exit the square before the mob realized we weren't going to stop. They had been waiting for us to begin our rally before charging into us — which the almost total absence of law enforcement eloquently invited them to do.

When they saw we were escaping they chased after us but were blocked by the few troopers on hand. Unable to get at us, they then attacked news reporters and a TV crew, beating them and smashing their cameras. On Monday, the national media, both print and broadcast, featured the mob violence of the evening before in a glare of negative publicity.

The ideological divisions within the Grenada white power structure were mirrored by similar conflicts at the state level. Both locally and in Jackson, hardliners still believed they could beat Blacks back into Jim Crow submission, so police and mob violence suited them down to the ground. Meanwhile moderates were trying to soften the state's image so as to attract northern investment. The beating of newsmen and smashing of cameras generated intense negative publicity and that temporarily strengthened the moderates.

With the moderate faction back in the ascendancy, trooper command must have convinced their higher-ups that bluffing us out of marching wasn't going to work, so they sent in a whole company of troopers with orders to suppress mob violence. They assured their white constituents that if they deprived the press of dramatic newsworthy events — such as mob violence against reporters and cameramen — the reporters would leave. And that without national publicity in the northern media, Afro-American protests in Grenada would dwindle away to nothing — leaving the old order of tranquil white supremacy restored. So the

moderate local white leaders urged their constituents to stay away from our marches.

On Monday night, the 25th, the white mob on the square was just half the size of the previous evening, perhaps around 500 or so, and close to 100 troopers were out in force to prevent any photogenic violence. Some 220 of us marched around the green ignoring their shouted jeers, insults, and threats and the occasional rocks and bottles hurled our way. The next night, no more than 100 whites were present and we outnumbered them, so we resumed our rallies on the green under the protection of the troopers. By the end of the week, the general pattern of daytime boycott leafletting and picketing, canvassing and organizing, nightly marches to a square empty of hostile whites, followed by a rally on the green or a voter registration rally in a Black neighborhood had reasserted itself — organized mob violence had failed to halt our daily protest marches a clear Movement victory.

Though we didn't know it at the time, this series of events set a pattern. We or the courts would do something that infuriated the segregationists, the hardliners would temporarily wrest political control from the moderates and they'd mobilize a white mob to attack both us and the press. After two or three days of brutal violence and subsequent media condemnation, the moderates would be re-empowered, the governor would send in state troopers to control the mob, and the hardliners would tell their violent supporters to stand down for the time being. When the violence stopped, the TV cameras would leave and we'd be back to marching around an empty square — until we did something that provoked a new wave of violence.

Over the next week we continued our boycott picketing, voter registration, and nightly marches to the square. Yet the power structure's "no audience" scheme didn't mean an end to repression. The local police and sheriff's deputies increased their harassment arrests for alleged traffic violations, "disturbing the peace," and other trumped-up charges. SCLC staff member R.B. Cottenreader was arrested for "touching" a white lady while picketing, the driver and three passengers were arrested for their car being in the intersection when the stoplight changed to yellow, and so on. (It was common in the Deep South for civil rights activists behind the wheel *and their passengers* to be arrested for minor traffic infractions rather than just given a ticket.)

In early August we received a welcome sign that the boycott was having an effect. On Friday the 5th, bogus "Boycott Over" leaflets mysteriously appeared in the main Afro-American neighborhoods. No one was fooled and the blackout continued.

That evening there was a fund-raising party in Grenada's Tie Plant neighborhood with entertainment by SCLC's Freedom Singers. Not being an alcohol drinker, I went home after their set. Around midnight, troopers and police surrounded the Collins Cafe where the party was being held and blocked

all the roads leading into the area. They shot tear gas into the building and arrested about 50 people on various charges such as "possession of liquor" and "drunk and disorderly."

[Grenada was a "dry" county, which meant that in the time-honored southern tradition local lawmen enriched themselves by collecting regular bribes from bootleggers of both races. Which meant that they knew from the Afro-American bootleggers when and where parties were planned. In some cases, that worked to the movement's advantage as a covert communication back channel to the police and sheriffs. And on occasion Black bootleggers were able to talk the cops into releasing someone who had been arrested by error or misunderstanding — "Come on, Sheriff, that child wasn't picketing, she was going to visit her auntie."]

At our mass meeting the next day people voted to update the 51 demands of July 9 with additional demands related to police repression and freedom of speech and assembly. We also added dropping the charges against those arrested the night before. Evidently this convinced the hardliners that their "no audience" strategy was failing to weaken the Movement. So once again their strategic pendulum swung back towards violence. *

Faulkner Nailed It ~ 1966

By the end of July, Grenada Mississippi was becoming increasingly dangerous. The racists who had fired a machine gun at a government official and civil rights workers had been acquitted on all charges by an all-white jury. Klansmen who had been seen inciting the mobs on the square were prowling about and becoming ever more menacing. It was too risky for white freedom riders like me to canvass out in the rural areas, and even in town the sense of imminent threat was palpable.

State troopers might be under orders from a federal injunction to protect our marches, but it was clear they had no intention of guarding individuals from KKK terrorism outside the marches. The home where I boarded was on Newsome Alley just a block off Highway 51. Though it was in the heart of the Union Street Afro-American neighborhood, it would be a quick and easy target for a Klan night raid. So I decided to buy a pistol for protection. I already knew how to shoot. My dad had given me my first rifle when I turned 12. By high school age I was a paid-up member of the National Rifle Association and shot competitively on an NRA-sanctioned rifle team.

Stores selling guns were plentiful in Grenada and the surrounding Mississippi counties, but they were all owned by hostile whites who we were

* See www.crmvet.org/docs/grendocs.htm for the text of the revised demands and other documents and reports from the Grenada Movement.

boycotting. And after my experience with Chief Raupach and his shoebox of dossiers in Crenshaw County, it seemed likely that a gun store owner might recognize me and report back to both cops and Klan.

My friend Richard Thompson from L.A. CORE and N-VAC was another white civil rights worker. He was now on the CORE field staff working in Claiborne Parish, Louisiana, a five-hour drive from Grenada through Greenville and Monroe, so I decided to visit him and buy some protection in a different state.

He took me over to the nearby town of Minden where he wasn't well known and there were several stores and pawn shops selling a wide array of firearms. No state identification, background check, or paperwork were required — it was simply cash on the counter and walk out with your piece. I bought a used Beretta Puma semi-automatic pistol and a couple of extra clips. It was a compact weapon that fit easily into my pocket or the attaché case I used for flyers and other written materials. While I never carried it on a protest or at a Movement meeting, its presence was a comfort at night on the table beside me or when I was driving through rural areas.

In preparation for going South I had read a number of books. The most useful was *The New Abolitionists* by Howard Zinn which oriented me to Civil Rights Movement realities and organizational strategies and tactics. For understanding the sociology and psychology of Jim Crow and the southern way of life, the ones that proved most helpful were *Killers of the Dream* by Lillian Smith because it explored the intense, intimate intersection of race, gender, and misogyny, and the novels of William Faulkner — novels that to at least a degree prepared me for the twisted, psychological weirdness that white supremacy and Jim Crow segregation imposed on southern society and relationships between Blacks and whites.

Richard and I returned to the village of Homer where he was based, and later that evening he told me an interesting story. One day he'd been at the freedom house when a white guy pulled up in an old car and knocked on the door. Dressed for farm work, he was middle-aged, with dry leathery skin. In other words, the kind of guy who a lot of folks called a "redneck" and who looked and dressed no different than most Klan members.

"You the civil rights?" he asked Richard.

"Yes," replied Richard cautiously, ready to slam and lock the door if he needed to.

"Well, I need your help," the guy told him. Which, as you can imagine, surprised the hell out of Richard, who then invited him inside.

"I been to the sheriff and the mayor," the guy told him, "and they won't do nuthing. The judge neither. Won't nobody help me, so I come to you."

He went on to explain that in addition to the farm where he lived he owned a second piece of land where a new dam was being built to create a recreational lake. His property would be on the new lakefront. A wealthy local landowner wanted to buy up his parcel to develop a fishing lodge but he didn't want to sell — at least not at the price being offered — and he had refused several times to accept ever more insistent demands.

He had long been renting out that land to an Afro-American tenant farmer. Recently the wooden shack on the property had burned down, killing his tenant. He was convinced the fire was arson, deliberately set to force him to sell. That got his dander up, and the murder of his tenant also irked him. As he put it, "He was the best durned nigger I ever had." So he went to the authorities, who refused to investigate the fire as a possible arson.

"Now, you don't have to just take my word for this," he assured Richard. "I got proof." He showed Richard a map marked with the location of his land and the anticipated shoreline of the new lake. He also had a clipping from the local paper describing the fire and the man's death as "accidental." Then he asked Richard to follow him out to his car where he opened up the trunk and there in a white enamel washbasin were the charred bones of his dead tenant.

Now don't tell me that Faulkner's tales weren't based in the nitty-gritty realities of the "southern way of life."

Speaking of which, years later I was told by SNCC worker Bob Weil about his meeting an elderly Black woman in a shack near Oxford, Mississippi who spoke in exactly the same kind of stream-of-consciousness language — the voice — that Faulkner wrote in. Turned out she had been a domestic servant in Faulkner's home and, as was quite common in the South, had helped raise him. And that she had known, and talked to him about, many of the real people his characters were later based on. So far as I know, she never received a word of credit in any of Faulkner's books.

Anyway, Richard told the farmer guy there wasn't anything that he as a CORE activist could do himself, but he sent him on to the ACLU down in New Orleans. He never heard from him again. The next morning I drove back to Grenada with the attaché case containing my Beretta on the seat beside me. Thankfully, that I never had to use it.

Battle for the Ballot ~ 1966

Back in mid-July, federal voter registrars had been sent to Grenada under the Voting Rights Act.

[In the language of the Voting Rights Act, federal officers assigned to enforce it were officially known as "examiners" rather than "registrars." But in common usage, everyone referred to them as "registrars."]

The federal registrars operated out of the post office on the square with little success. In two weeks only 22 Afro-Americans were added to the rolls, an average of two per day.

The reason was obvious — Blacks were afraid to go into the downtown area. Most of the Afro-Americans willing to defy white supremacy by registering to vote were boycotting the downtown stores, so they were no longer shopping on the square. Police and state troopers were harassing, and sometimes arresting, anyone they suspected might be intending to hand out boycott flyers or picket a store. And white racists were on the prowl ready to attack "troublemakers," who in their view meant anyone with a dark skin. So as far as most Afro-Americans were concerned, the federal registrars were located in a zone of hostility and danger.

We explained those realities to the federal registrars and suggested they set up shop in a Black neighborhood where they would be warmly welcomed. The registrars claimed that they *had* to work out of a United States government office and the post office on the square was the only federal presence available. That was bullshit — and everyone knew it. Legally, they could operate wherever they chose and in many other counties federal registrars operated out of Afro-American churches, stores, community centers, and so on.

Off the record, the registrars let us know they were under orders from their supervisors in Jackson to have no association with us or any appearance of being allied to the Freedom Movement in any way, shape, or form. The local white power structure understood the social dynamics of violent racism as well as we did, and they were using their considerable political power and influence with officials in Jackson to ensure that the registrars remained downtown where they would have minimal success.

We filed complaints, and I guess the SCLC office in Washington began contacting supporters in Congress and rattling some administration cages because on Monday, August 8, the registrars changed their minds and moved their operation to the Chat & Chew on Union Street in the heart of the main Black community. On their first day there more than 300 people showed up to get registered, including many who were finishing up the registration process started at the courthouse back in June but not completed because of the double-registration trick.

We were elated. The white power structure, however, was furious. To them, shifting the registrars into the Afro-American community was evidence of *sinister collusion* between defiant Blacks and a hostile federal government. They understood as clearly as we did that large numbers of Black voters would

ultimately doom their traditional methods of maintaining Jim-Crow-style white supremacy. Since whites held narrow population majorities in both county and city, they were confident that Blacks could never elect an Afro-American sheriff or judge, but Black voters might be able to elect one or two county supervisors or city council members from Black-majority beats and wards.

And in city and countywide elections, Blacks might end up holding the balance of power between competing white candidates. If that came to pass, sooner or later whites challenging incumbent officeholders would begin advocating policies and offering concessions aimed at winning the support of Black voters — thus eroding the complete exclusion of Afro-Americans from all aspects of political power. That wouldn't usher in any dawn of full-on Black Power, but it would definitely mean an end to white-only power. So within the local power structure the hardliners once again took control. If they couldn't block Black registration through tricks and ploys they'd return to their traditional methods of violence and intimidation.

Rather than our usual march to the square, on the night the registrars set up shop on Union Street we staged a voter registration rally in front of the Chat & Chew. The crowd soon swelled to over 500, with Movement leaders speaking from the roof of a parked car. Since there were no streetlights in the Black community, the only illumination came from the flickering light of Chat's business sign.

Union Street was narrow, just one lane in each direction, and back then that block was hemmed in by buildings and rental shacks. There was no way so many folks could gather without blocking traffic — which wasn't really an issue because whites rarely drove into the Black community at night and Blacks had no problem using another street to go around. Nevertheless, the cops ordered us to clear the road. We did the best we could, squeezing open a single-car lane through the middle of the throng even though there were no drivers attempting to use it.

I was one of the protest marshals trying to keep the car lane open. Suddenly there was some unintelligible shouting through a blurry bullhorn followed almost immediately with the now familiar *Pop! Pop! Pop!* of tear gas canisters exploding all around us.

As with the Canton attack in June, I again experienced searing smoke, burning eyes, and crushing lung pain. Troopers in gas masks loomed out of the darkness and chemical fog to smash people with their rifle butts, while sheriffs and cops flailed away at anyone in reach with their clubs. We all fled as best we could. Later that night, I was in SCLC's little office at the back of Belle Flower compiling a list of more than 20 people injured badly enough to require medical attention. Afterwards, unable to sleep, I wrote one of the only two poems I've ever written:

MISSISSIPPI VOTER RALLY

*Hot, drippy evening,
 red & yellow bars of neon light.
 A crowd of dark shadows
 defiantly standing in the Mississippi night.
 Car roof buckles under the weight
 of silhouetted shadows against the neon.
 Courage and song rise up from
 the surrounding sea of unseen folk
 engulfing us like a warm friendly ocean.*

*Helmets advance out of the dark
 fearsome, their long false faces
 hideous masks of death.
 A shouted command, choking fumes,
 explosions,
 screams,
 terror.
 Can't breathe, can't see.*

*The warm ocean scatters like
 spilled quicksilver.
 Blindly running, blindly escaping.
 Clubs thud against fragile flesh
 as helmets leap out of the night,
 out of the agonizing blinding fog
 to fall on helpless innocence.*

*Quiet, echoing quiet,
 the damp Mississippi night closes in
 on homes strangely dark.
 Black shadows peer from dark windows
 as the Mars-men patrol
 their temporarily conquered territory,
 boots echoing off stony-faced homes.*

*Inside, in the dark, human blast furnaces
 forge inner resolve.
 Hammers of rage pounding out determination,
 tomorrow... tomorrow... tomorrow..*

The next evening, Tuesday, August 9th, we came back and again held a voting rally at the Chat & Chew. People were afraid of another tear gas attack so the crowd was noticeably smaller — a bit under 300. Our lawyers had complained to Federal Judge Clayton in Oxford about the troopers and cops violating his injunction against interfering with a lawful protest, and so on this night they didn't attack us.

Instead, a crowd of angry whites — young men mostly — suddenly appeared at the corner of Union St. and Highway 51, which at that time was

called Commerce Street (today it's Martin Luther King Blvd). This was the heart of the Black community and no group of hostile whites had ever shown up there to harass a civil rights gathering. They'd obviously been mobilized and organized by someone — Citizens Council, Klan, or someone else, we didn't know. They gathered less than 50 feet from our rally and began pelting us with rocks and bottles thrown over the heads of the few cops standing between the two groups.

As required by Clayton's injunction, we had informed the authorities of our intention to march up to the square from the Chat & Chew. About 280 of us, mostly high-school-age girls and boys and adult women, led by a small number of adult men, marched over to Pearl Street and then up Pearl past Belle Flower for our normal route downtown. In reluctant obedience to the court order, the troopers cleared a path for us through the throng of hostile whites — who then raced up Cherry Street to reach the square before us.

When we got to the square it was occupied by 750 or so whites including those who had attacked our rally on Union Street. Half of them were actually on the green where we usually held our rallies, the remainder were across the street on the sidewalks. At least two formations of riot-equipped troopers were standing around but they didn't seem interested in taking any action. For their part, the local lawmen seemed quite friendly to the angry mob. In an article the next day, Jack Nelson of the *Los Angeles Times* quoted Grenada County Sheriff Suggs Ingram as saying, "Now you're going to see a show."

As usual we were walking two by two in groups of 20 with a few march marshals like me paralleling the line. We quickly closed up, eliminating the section gaps required by Clayton's march rules — if he didn't like it he could lump it. Holding ourselves in a tight disciplined formation was our best protection. Each marcher's body was partially protected by those pressing in close from front, behind, and one side. If the racists attacked with clubs and fists they had to assault the column as a whole rather than ganging up on individuals as they normally preferred. And by singing our freedom songs as loud as we could, we not only bolstered our courage but manifested our presence as a unified group rather than a collection of individuals.

As we neared the central green the mob began bombarding us with hurled bricks, rocks, bottles, and exploding cherry bombs. I and the other marshals did what we could to knock the flying missiles aside and dodge those we couldn't block. Our job was to hold everyone together and keep the formation tight, because if they managed to break into our line and scatter us we'd be stomped.

"Hold tight, hold tight," I kept shouting over the massed singing. "Keep moving, keep moving!" Of course, nobody needed my shouted instructions, by now they were all experienced protesters. But tightly packed against each other with their heads down and faces pressed for protection against the person in front of them, they couldn't see what was happening around them, and the commands

shouted by us marshals let them know the line was still intact and discipline holding.

Suddenly a band of whites on the green charged against us, shrieking rage and hitting people with pipes and sticks. "Niggers! Niggers! Kill the niggers! Kill 'em! Kill 'em!"

As a white freedom rider and a marshal outside the line, I was an easier target than those paired up and tightly packed. When they swarmed us, I pressed myself tight against the march line's flank, holding on to two marchers as strong as I could. They clasped their arms around my waist to keep me from being pulled away. With my head down and my face buried in their shoulders for protection, I wasn't able to recognize who they were — they were fellow freedom fighters, that's all that mattered. As the swirl of racist thugs surged by me I was punched and kicked and struck by their clubs, but they failed to knock me down or drag me apart from the others.

As more and more whites charged at us with bats and clubs, we couldn't reach the green or hold our ground in the street. We were forced to retreat to the intersection of Green and Doak streets at the northwest corner of the square, and then up Green towards Pearl Street.

The 50 or so state troopers watched it all but did nothing to deter the white violence. From past experience we knew they were waiting for some tiny sign of defensive violence on our part as an excuse for arresting all those who dared to challenge the southern way of life. They must have been bitterly disappointed that none of us provided the pretext they were waiting for. One of the lawmen threw a tear gas bomb into our line. With the mob still hounding us, we didn't dare scatter, so we had to just hold our breath and walk through the poisonous fumes.

In good order, with our column solid and our songs still repelling their racist hate, we retreated from the square and headed back to the Chat & Chew on Union Street. The mob began to follow us and finally the troopers bestirred themselves. They formed a line across the road between the tail end of our march and the jeering, howling segregationists. With their rifles and shotguns resting upright on their hips they faced us rather than the violent whites behind them. A posture that declared to all and sundry that they saw themselves as protecting the square and white supremacy from defiant but nonviolent Afro-Americans demanding justice. Which, of course, was exactly the case. From behind the troopers, the whites continued to hurl their missiles at us over the heads of the lawmen for as long as we were in range.

Some of the marchers were bruised and bleeding, but just one person needed hospital care — testimony to the effectiveness of nonviolent discipline and training that carried 280 protesters, mostly women and children, through an attack by a violent mob of more than 750 racists. For myself, I was badly bruised,

had a painful knot on my skull and some bloody cuts, but was not seriously injured.

The next evening, Wednesday, August 10, we again rallied outside Chat's on Union Street. Again a white mob formed at Union and Commerce, this time armed with large slingshots that they used to shoot lead fishing sinkers, sharp links of steel chain, and exploding cherry bombs at us — missiles that sailed over the heads of the troopers to draw blood and inflict injury on us. We feared that someone might lose an eye but fortunately that didn't occur though half a dozen people were injured.

After the bloody assault of the night before, this rally was even smaller than Tuesday's. But it was almost entirely made up of adult Black men who had turned out to face mob violence in place of their wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. This was extraordinary. Throughout the South, Afro-American men were the most vulnerable to white violence and retaliation, far more so than women and kids. Black men were the ones most often lynched or assassinated by the Klan, they were the ones the cops arrested on phony charges and sentenced to years in prison. And it was Afro-American men — the family breadwinners — who were most likely to be fired from their jobs if they participated in a protest.

But on *this* night, in *this* small Mississippi town, *these* Black men were determined they would not be driven off the square by white violence. They would not retreat from the green. They had told the women and kids to stand aside so they could step up. They understood and accepted the necessity of nonviolence, some reluctantly so, others with more commitment. They were ready to endure whatever they had to endure in order to resist — nonviolently. To enforce this, Afro-American SCLC staff members moved through the crowd collecting knives and a few pistols that some of the men had brought with them. As a white activist, it was not my place to do that.

As it happened though, our project director J.T. Johnson and the other senior SCLC staff members assigned to Grenada were now in Jackson for the Tenth Annual SCLC Convention. The fact that Dr. King could hold a convention in Mississippi and be welcomed by the new mayor was incontrovertible evidence that the Freedom Movement was defeating old-style Jim Crow white supremacy across the South — even if Grenada had not yet received the memo.

But rather than let us handle this mob violence crisis on our own, some SCLC functionary decided to send in a temporary project director who had a great deal of direct action experience in other states but had never been to Grenada before. Led by the temporary director, about 250 of us, almost all adult Black men, marched up towards the square.

Again, a furious white mob outnumbering us three to one was waiting. But state officials in Jackson, reeling from yet another round of atrocious publicity from the previous attacks, were desperate to prevent a third outbreak of racist

violence. They sent in more troopers and a posse of state game wardens with new orders from the governor. When the whites opened up on us with their rocks, bottles, cherry bombs, and slingshots, they began maneuvering in formation to force the mob out of the square.

Unfortunately, the new march leader was unfamiliar with the situation and previous events. He thought the police were setting a trap, that they were clearing out the mob so they themselves could smash our line with gas, clubs, and mass arrests without worrying about hurting local white folk. So as the mob was being pushed out of the square to the south and east he led us west back to Belle Flower. The square was left empty of everyone except law enforcement.

Afterwards, there was enormous disappointment and frustration over retreating from the square, particularly among the Black men who had worked up their courage and defiance to a peak, came out to march — nonviolently — into a racist mob and then been undercut by a mistaken decision. Most of those men never marched again. On the next march, and all the marches that followed, the pattern of a few dozen men leading hundreds of women and students reasserted itself.

For a time I was angry at that leader and even more so at the higher-ups who placed over us someone unfamiliar with the situation. But when the convention was over and J.T. resumed his project director position, the temporary director stayed and continued to work in Grenada, where he showed himself to be a brave and effective organizer — and a good leader. In time I came to understand that he had led us off the square not out of personal fear but out of responsibility for the safety of the people he was charged with caring for.

And I also understood that while his error had unhappy consequences, the self-discipline that resulted in the rest of us obeying his order to retreat even though we disagreed with it was the very thing that in the long run kept us safe and united. It was that kind of self-discipline — even in the case of a mistake — that was the foundation on which Freedom Movement victories were won.

Meanwhile, the white power structure continued trying to prevent Afro-Americans from registering to vote. A few days earlier they had resurrected an old ordinance forbidding gatherings at the courthouse, but since voter registration was now being done at the Chat & Chew, the courthouse was no longer our focus. So on Thursday the 11th, the Grenada City Council passed a new law forbidding any public gatherings on the green.

Apparently they also decided to give their “no audience” strategy another try because no whites showed up to harass our voter registration rally at Chat’s and only a small handful of hecklers were on the square when we arrived — too few to even be called a gang, much less a mob. The cops blocked us from walking on to the square, so we marched around it a few times singing our freedom songs — we felt like Joshua marching around Jericho.

When we marched up to the square on Friday evening there were no white hecklers at all. One of SCLC's Executive Staff leaders from Atlanta was in town and he told us that without dramatic violence to film and write about, the TV cameras and reporters were going to depart as they always did. He ordered some of the SCLC staff to try pushing our way onto the green *through* the cops. I and another staff member refused. It seemed an artificial, ego-driven publicity stunt to me, and that wasn't enough to motivate me into getting my head split open by police billy clubs. While the march circled around the square, some of other staff members did try to get on the green. They were shoved off by the cops and seven were arrested.

As we began to leave the square a formation of troopers suddenly charged against the rear end — I have no idea what their excuse was. A number of marchers were injured, including Emerald Cunningham, age 14, a polio survivor who was unable to run or dodge. They brutally beat her in the back with their rifle butts. I was in my usual spot as rear guard marshal and I also got clobbered. As it turned out, I'd have been safer if I'd agreed to be one of those arrested for trying to get on the green.

I and the other guy who had refused to participate in what I continued to view as an egotistic publicity stunt were ordered by that SCLC official to report to SCLC headquarters in Atlanta for "disciplinary action." The other guy went. I didn't. It was well known in the Freedom Movement that while SNCC and CORE were egalitarian, SCLC was hierarchical. Yet it wasn't as rigidly structured as it sometimes appeared from the outside. I just continued on in Grenada doing my work. After a week or so that officer told me that since I obviously wasn't going to obey him, I should stay in Grenada. The other guy returned to duty after a week of boredom in Atlanta.

That particular SCLC leader remained annoyed with me for quite a while, but other than that my disobedience resulted in no further consequences — I'm not sure why. It may be he knew he had been wrong. He ordered no further attempts to provoke dramatic action by pushing on to the green, and soon the press departed. J.T. and the other SCLC staff members didn't condemn me for my refusal, nor did they insist that I be sent away. And their silent support probably carried a lot of weight. And I suspect that local leaders and local folk who knew me quietly supported me behind the scenes.

After that Friday night attack on the tail end of the march, the normal routine settled back in. Day after day I continued canvassing door-to-door, doing office and research work, and representing SCLC at small house meetings. Every evening 200-300 of us would participate in the nightly mass meeting and then march up to the deserted square and circle around the green a few times before returning to the church. We were always relieved to find the square empty of hostile whites, but it was kind of eerie protesting in a square containing no one but ourselves and the cops.

A Mississippi Trial ~ 1966

On Monday August 22nd, we held our normal nightly march. It seemed no different than any other march. On the following night we began our pre-march mass meeting in Belle Flower as usual, until latecomers reported that the cops had surrounded the church. An SCLC staff member, I think it might have been Leon Hall, left the building to find out what they wanted. He was immediately arrested, apparently on some kind of warrant. Project Director J.T. Johnson followed and he too was busted. Nobody knew why.

Hosea Williams was in town that night as the featured speaker. He told the meeting they were trying to pick off the leaders and he assumed he was the prime target. He instructed everyone to line up at the two doors and all the side windows which were all wide open in the muggy heat of an August evening. At his command everyone was instructed to nonviolently flood out from all possible exits and scatter as fast as they could to limit the number arrested. Anyone nabbed was to go limp, but not otherwise resist.

It was a good plan and it worked quite well — except for me. In the darkness only about a dozen people were arrested, but as one of the few whites trying to escape in the darkness, I was easily spotted and quickly nabbed.

As I was hustled off to the Grenada County lockup I asked the arresting officer what I was being arrested for. He answered by hard-jabbing his billy club into my gut. I interpreted that as an indication he wasn't in a conversational mood. At the jail we all were treated to the usual hospitality that Mississippi police extended to civil rights troublemakers — kicks and punches, being slammed up against the wall, enthusiastic frisking for concealed weapons or subversive literature, and all the other little flourishes by which they expressed their opinion of us.

We were jam-crammed into small cells. Two or three days went by and we still hadn't been told what we were charged with. For some reason we weren't bailed out. No phone calls were allowed. Just a dozen of us stuck in the slammer with lousy food, no showers, and no clue as to what was going on. And of course, no "Miranda rights" to remain silent or be represented by an attorney — those rights didn't exist in 1966.

Finally, someone showed up and introduced himself as our lawyer sent from the ACLU office in Jackson. He was one of the volunteer lawyers who came down from the North on their summer vacation to defend civil rights workers. He'd just arrived in Mississippi from, I think New York, and we were his first case. I can't recall his name other than it was a very Jewish name, so I'll just call him Israel Feldstein (a name I'm making up).

"I've been sent to represent you in your trial today," he told us. That was the first we'd heard about a trial date.

"What are they charging you with?" he asked us.

Okay, confession time. The honest truth is that we were bored, frustrated and downright grumpy. "You're the lawyer, why are you asking us what the charges are?" someone responded in a surly tone.

"They're holding you for days and they haven't told you the charges?"

He was clearly surprised and I remember thinking to myself, *Jeez, what planet is this cat from? Welcome to Mississippi, Izzy.*

"Okay," he assured us, "the first thing I'll do is find out the charges."

"Right, you do that. Good idea!"

A few minutes later they marched us into court. As project director, J.T. sat with the lawyer while the rest of us were seated in a row behind their table. True to his promise, Izzy right off asked what the charges were and the prosecutor read out this long list of crimes like insurrection, riot, sedition, disturbing the peace, disorderly conduct, and so forth — I can't remember them all but it was a very impressive list.

The prosecutor then got up to commence his case, but Izzy interrupted. "Excuse me, your Honor, but where's the court reporter? There's no one taking a record.

The judge slammed his gavel down and shouted at him, "I don't need no God damned kike telling me how to run my court! You want a court reporter? You pay for him yourself!"

Of course, even if we had had the dough (which we didn't), all Mississippi court reporters were white and even if there was one in Grenada it was unlikely he would offend the judge by working for civil rights supporters in a case where his presence wasn't mandated by law. And for all we knew, the nearest Black court reporter might be in Memphis.

Moreover, I don't think Izzy had ever been called a "kike" in a court of law before — certainly not by the judge. This was clearly a new experience for him. But though he most likely grew up as some scrawny Jewish nerd from the Big Apple, you don't mess with Manhattan. He had some game and wasn't going to be intimidated. "Well, if that's the way it's gonna be, your Honor, we want a jury trial."

This particular judge was on the lowest rung of the judicial ladder, he was only authorized to try the most minor of cases — those that used six-man juries. (Women, emotionally frail and prone to the vapors as they were assumed to be, were not permitted to sit on Mississippi criminal case juries in 1966.)

The judge grinned. Lounging around his courtroom were a dozen or more of the regular courthouse loafers, good ol' boys all well known to him. "Tom,

Billy-Bob, Frank, Mo, George, Gumby, you're appointed to jury duty. Get in the box."

I guess Izzy realized that there wasn't going to be any questioning of potential jurors for bias, so he said nothing as the judge asked the jury, "You all swear to do your duty?"

"Oh, yeah, right Judge. You bet."

The prosecutor then called Suggs Ingram, the sheriff, as his first witness. "Sheriff Ingram, please describe to this honorable court the criminal behavior you observed these felons commit."

"Oh, they committed insurrection, they was riotous, they disturbed the peace..." He just reiterated all of the charges in verb form.

The prosecutor nodded wisely and then said, "Thank you, Sheriff Ingram. No further questions."

The judge asked Izzy, "Do you want to cross-examine?"

"How can I cross-examine? He hasn't said anything yet." But seeing that the judge was about to dismiss the witness, Izzy got up and asked Suggs, "Sheriff Ingram, could you describe what the defendants did?"

So Suggs started going into his "Well, they was riotous and they..."

Izzy interrupted him. "No, no, Sheriff. Could you please explain what they actually did? What were their physical actions?"

The light dawned on Suggs's face. "Oh, they started singing on the south side of the telephone building." There was triumph in his voice. He knew he had us now.

Izzy, of course, had no clue what the bejeezus Sheriff Ingram was talking about, so he consulted briefly with J.T., who I assumed explained to him that we were under Judge Clayton's federal injunction prohibiting us from singing in residential neighborhoods. We could only sing in the downtown area and evidently the Grenada authorities were now claiming that the south side of the telephone building was somehow "residential," though once we had turned the corner we would clearly have been "downtown" (such as it was).

I don't think anyone had ever formally notified us that that portion of our normal march route was "residential," so we had simply made the assumption that since the telephone building wasn't anyone's home it wasn't "residential," and once we reached it we could start singing. Izzy then clarified with Suggs that the only thing that we were accused of actually doing was singing on the south side of the telephone building — a heinous crime to be sure, but one deserving charges of insurrection and riot? Apparently so, in Sheriff Ingram's opinion.

When Izzy finished with Sheriff Ingram the judge asked the prosecutor if he had any further witnesses. In yet another stellar example of Mississippi's swift and efficient dispensation of justice the prosecutor replied, "No, Your Honor, we rest our case."

The judge turned to Izzy. "Is the defense ready to present its case?"

"Your Honor," replied Izzy, "I can't present a defense because there's been no prosecution. The only thing my clients are accused of actually doing is violating a federal injunction. But they're not charged with that because this court has no jurisdiction. So there's no prosecution case against which I can present a defense because no evidence of any crime related to the charges has been presented. Therefore, I move for an immediate dismissal of all charges."

The judge didn't even bother waiting for the prosecutor to demur. "Motion denied. Is the jury ready to render its verdict? You won't need to withdraw or consult, will you?"

All the jurors shook their heads, murmuring, "Oh no, Your Honor, we're ready."

"What's your verdict, then?"

"Guilty Your Honor."

He immediately sentenced us to ten days in jail or fines of \$100 each (equal to around \$775 in 2018), which was the maximum penalty his court was allowed to levy. Izzy filed notice of appeal and we were released on bail.

As it turned out though, our lawyers later dropped that appeal because if we had won it our case would then have been retried before a higher-level judge who could have sentenced us to a year in prison if we were convicted. Since we had filed complaints against that particular judge for the role he played in leading a white mob that brutally assaulted Black schoolchildren attempting to integrate a previously white-only school, everyone concluded that appealing our \$100 fines was probably not a brilliant idea.

By that time though, it was more than a year later, the fall of 1967, and I was back in California attending San Francisco State College. SCLC was broke and hoped to recover the appeal bond money they had put up, so they wanted me to either send them \$100 to pay my fine or return to Mississippi to serve my ten-day sentence. But they didn't know how to reach me. So Rev. Jesse Jackson called my Mom in Connecticut, explained the problem, and asked her for my address and phone number.

"What? Are you crazy?" she responded with her usual diplomatic tact. "I'm not going to tell you where my son is!" She and Jesse then got into it, but she refused to give him my contact info because she was afraid that I would actually go back to Mississippi and be jailed out of some sense of political principle.

When she got around to informing me of this I was quite offended. By then I was a radical SDS "revolutionary." No way in hell was I going to supinely kowtow to "the man" by submitting to a racist kangaroo court, paying any police-state fine, or voluntarily surrendering myself for incarceration. Even though I'd been quite the idealist for the previous four years, I felt she should have intuitively grasped the new, more militant me and given Jesse my contact info so I could have personally refused him. Ah, such is the passion of youth.

The School Crisis ~ 1966

Not long after that trial, Afro-American parents began filling out "Freedom of Choice" forms for the court-ordered school desegregation of Grenada County's two "white" schools — John Rundle High and Lizzie Horn Elementary. They were adjacent to each other on South Line Street, a white neighborhood just a few blocks from Belle Flower and in easy walking distance from the main Afro-American community.

After the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, segregationists in the Deep South had been allowed to retain their separate and unequal white and Colored school systems. For ten years the court's "all deliberate speed" policy had allowed the South to almost entirely circumvent *Brown* by admitting just a token handful of Blacks to selected white schools in a few locales. But the Civil Rights Act of 1964 called for cutting off federal funds from segregated school systems. Without those federal dollars, southern politicians would have to either close schools or significantly raise taxes — neither of which would sit well with white voters. So most of them reluctantly realized they had to begin accepting at least a *few* Afro-Americans into *all* of the formerly white schools.

Yet they still hoped to retain their separate and unequal dual systems — one white, one Colored. For the ruling elite, it wasn't just that they wanted to limit social mingling between the races, it was also a matter of restricting as many Afro-Americans as possible to the kind of "sharecropper education" that limited them to menial, low-paid, and highly-exploited occupations like field hand and domestic servant.

To ensure that federal dollars continued to flow from Washington, while simultaneously keeping the great majority of Afro-American students in segregated schools, they devised "Freedom of Choice" plans. Under those plans, parents were legally "free" to choose which school — white or Colored — their children were to attend. Everyone knew, though, that Black parents who choose a white school faced firings, evictions, foreclosures, boycotts organized by the White Citizens' Council, and violent terrorism from the Ku Klux Klan.

Since few Black families could risk losing their job, home, or business (to say nothing of their lives), white political leaders across the Deep South were confident that just a few Black children would enroll in formerly all-white schools. Those few would then face harassment and humiliation by administrators and teachers — and implacable hostility and abuse from the white students who would outnumber them hundreds to one. Unrelenting pressure on Afro-American students and their families could then be counted on to force many (in some cases all) to “freely choose” to withdraw from the white school and go back to the Colored school.

Such “Freedom of Choice” plans allowed southern whites to piously claim they no longer practiced racial discrimination and that Afro-Americans simply didn't want integration because they were “freely choosing” to send their children to the segregated Colored schools. Since Afro-Americans were no longer *legally required* to attend Colored schools, officials argued they were in compliance with the Civil Rights Act and therefore should continue to receive federal education funds. From 1964 until 1968 when “Freedom of Choice” plans were finally ruled illegal they effectively perpetuated segregation in public school systems across most of the South.

But not in Grenada Mississippi.

Grenada had been one of those die-hard segregationist strongholds that refused to allow any school integration at all despite *Brown* and the Civil Rights Act. Which is where matters stood when the Meredith March and the 20th century arrived in June of 1966.

The newly-formed Grenada County Freedom Movement asked the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to file a lawsuit demanding that Grenada cease operating its completely segregated dual white and Colored school systems. Presented with an open-and-shut case of flagrant violation of both the *Brown* decision and the Civil Rights Act, a federal judge quickly ruled that Grenada schools had to be desegregated forthwith — by September!

The Grenada school board responded with a “Freedom of Choice” plan, no doubt expecting to end up with just a handful of Black children attending the two white schools. But Grenada now had a powerful and well-organized local movement to support Afro-American parents, assist them in resisting intimidation, and provide timely legal aid. And SCLC's Washington office stood ready to make sure that both the Justice and Education Departments diligently enforced federal law.

On Monday, August 29th, we organized hundreds of students and parents to march together en masse to pick up the “choice” forms. By Thursday, September 1st, some 450 Black kids had turned in forms choosing to attend the white schools — an enormous number, not just for Mississippi but for the entire

Deep South, where most white schools still had less than a dozen Afro-American students (if they had any at all).

Whites in Grenada were aghast — and *enraged*. Hecklers began returning to the square to harass our marches for the first time since the voter registration violence two weeks earlier. Day by day, the number of hostile whites shouting hate and fury rapidly increased. Though tension was clearly rising, few police or troopers were present.

Friday, September 2nd, was supposed to be the first day of school, but at the last minute the school board postponed it for ten days, citing the burdens of “paperwork.” Nevertheless, that evening the white high school played its first football game of the season. Football was an essential element of the Mississippi high school experience, so some of the Black kids who had registered to attend Rundle High showed up to support the Rundle Bulldogs. They were attacked by white students, beaten, and their car windows smashed with baseball bats. So much for school spirit.

It was a brutal attack and I filed a field report on it, but we in SCLC were so focused on the rising tension and hostility confronting our marches up on the square that we failed to take sufficient note of it — or to consider what the attack might portend.

Fri- 8/2/66 Field report, Bruce Hartford

Friday night the formerly white high school (John Rundle) had it's opening football game at the stadium. Two car loads of Negroes went out to the stadium to go to the game. They were assaulted by gangs of white teenagers who were waiting outside the stadium in case any Negroes tried to get in. Pat Lock, Constable of Beat-5 drew his pistol and smashed in the windows of one of the cars. Local youth leader Robert Johnson was beaten by the mob. Later a Negro man was driving by the stadium and the teenagers began to throw rocks at his car he sped up to get away and was arrested by state troopers on a traffic charge. 22

Segregationists used the ten-day delay to wage a fierce campaign against Afro-Americans, coercing them to withdraw their children from the two white schools. Some parents were fired from their jobs, others evicted from their homes. Black families and Movement activists were plagued with racist phone calls filled with curses, obscenities, and explicit death threats. Most folk responded by quickly hanging up, but Afro-American men who listened to the call were treated to graphic descriptions of how they would be castrated with rusty razor blades, and Black women were regaled with detailed descriptions of the brutal, savage rape soon to be inflicted on them — traditional aspects of “southern gentility” that might not be as well known in the North as mint juleps and ostentatious chivalry.

After being attacked by a white man while picketing a downtown store, SCLC staff members J.T. Johnson and R.B. Cottenreader filed an arrest warrant against him. They were then arrested when their white assailant swore out a

counter-warrant against them. One of our SCLC cars was firebombed, and when SCLC staff member Willie Bolden tried to talk to a police official about the escalating violence he was arrested on some vague charge.

Activists walking on the streets in the Afro-American community were now at risk. One day I was on Cherry Street, headed back toward Belle Flower after a catfish sandwich at Chat's, when a pickup truck came screeching to a halt next to me. The driver, a hefty white guy, leapt out, knocked me down, and when I curled up in the nonviolent defense position he kicked me again and again.

His son, maybe 10 or 11, jumped out and began stomping on my glasses which had fallen on the pavement. "Daddy, Daddy, they won't break!" he shouted. Damn straight. On one of my visits to my parents in New Haven I'd had a special unbreakable pair of industrial-strength safety glasses made. He was able to damage the plastic frames but not the lenses. After a couple of minutes they both got tired, returned to their truck, and drove off — their civic duty for the day accomplished. I wasn't injured, just the usual bruises and scrapes, so I dusted myself off and continued to our office in the back of the church.

At night, as the old saying went, I "slept with one eye open" — and my Beretta beneath my pillow. (Metaphorically speaking of course. Trying to sleep with a pistol actually under your pillow is quite uncomfortable.)

To support students and parents we doubled up, marching to the square in the afternoon and evening. Day after day and night after night, 200–300 courageous activists marched and marched again. Day after day and night after night the white mobs grew larger and angrier, hurling objects at us and attacking with fists, bats, chains, and steel pipes. Though cops and troopers were under court order to restrain violence and protect us from mob attack, the reluctant, half-hearted, and pro forma gestures they made in that direction were clearly no more than a pretense. Neither we nor the mob took them seriously — we were on our own.

This racist campaign of intimidation, retaliation, and violence was obviously being organized and orchestrated by someone — but who? Klan? White Citizens' Council? Elected officials? Clearly, whoever was behind it wanted Black parents to ponder what might happen to an isolated Black child in a white school surrounded by hostile teachers and students.

We refused to back down. On Thursday, September 8, the Grenada County Freedom Movement defiantly issued a new, more comprehensive set of demands. The original July 9 demands had focused on various kinds of segregation. A month later, the August demands concentrated on ending specific police abuses. The new September demands reflected a growing conviction among local leaders and activists that the root issue was power — political and economic. The GCFM goals were reformulated into a broad, category-by-category demand for economic

justice and a fair share of political power in Grenada. The phrase "Black Power" wasn't used but it was a clear step in that direction. *

On the Saturday afternoon before school opened only 160 people showed up to march, noticeably fewer than normal. As usual, they were mostly women and high school kids. When we arrived downtown for the afternoon march we saw that whites greatly outnumbered us — and they had a new tactic. Instead of gathering on the sidewalk around the perimeter of the square to shout abuse and hurl objects, the segregationists were now parading around the green themselves in the street where we normally marched now that the green itself was off limits. We fell in behind them with a narrow gap between the two groups, and both groups circled the green several times, one behind the other.

That evening when our second march of barely 200 reached the square after dark the whites were again parading, but now they had thinned their line to completely surround the green. So our march circled around the green parallel to their march — side by side as it were (though not, of course, in solidarity with each other). Their proximity made it easy for them to dart into our line, and a number of our people were attacked, including SCLC staff members Alphonzo Harris and Mike Bibler.

The segregationists had the edge in violence but we were superior in song and spirit, easily drowning out their racist chants and their pitiful attempts to sing *Dixie* against our *Oh Freedom*.

On Sunday afternoon, the day before school was to open, we didn't march due to church services but some 200 of us grimly gathered our courage and headed for the square in the evening. Again a large crowd of hostile racists far outnumbered us. But they'd abandoned their counter-parade strategy and resumed heckling and throwing rocks and bottles from the sidewalk around the square. Since there was no communication between whites and Blacks in Grenada, we could only speculate on why they did or didn't do this or that. Perhaps marching in even loose formation was too disciplined for them and they preferred to mill around as a mob and share whiskey from bottles concealed by brown paper bags.

Most of the hostile whites contented themselves by shouting their racist hate and hurling rocks, bottles, and cherry bombs at us, but half a dozen of the most violent suddenly charged into our line, beating R.B. Cottonreader and others before pulling back. Among those injured was SCLC staff member Lula Williams, who was attacked by a white woman who repeatedly clubbed her with a furled umbrella.

* See www.crmvet.org/docs/grendocs.htm for the text of the August demands and other documents and reports from the Grenada Movement.

Despite our efforts, economic retaliation and the escalating violence were having the desired effect. Threatened by loss of jobs and evictions and fearing for their safety of their children, the parents of some 200 of the 450 Afro-American students who had registered for the white schools "freely chose" to withdraw their kids and re-register them at the Colored schools. But to segregationist fury, some 250 Black elementary and high school students remained committed to integrating the previously all-white Grenada schools.

Mob Terror & the Courage of Children ~ 1966

Monday, September 12, was the first day of integrated school. A furious mob of more than 500 white supremacists surrounded the two formerly all-white schools, determined to block Black children from entering.

This was not a spontaneous outburst of rage, it was a well-organized attack with visible leaders — one of whom was Judge Ayers, the Grenada Justice of the Peace. Rather than protecting children from violent attack, almost every elected official and lawman from Grenada City and County was present to defend segregation. Scouts in pickup trucks with two-way radios patrolled the nearby streets, targeting "action teams" against Black children ranging in age from 6 to 17 who were walking to school. And judging by their license plates, racists from all over the state had converged on Grenada, many of them no doubt Klansmen.

Some cars carrying Black children managed to drop their kids off, others were blocked and attacked by the mob who smashed windows with baseball bats and steel pipes and then battered those inside.

The majority of the 250 or so Black students who were still determined to integrate the white schools came from the northside Afro-American neighborhood around Belle Flower where the Freedom Movement had its strongest base. Most of them were walking to school in ones and twos when they were set upon by roving bands who beat them with clubs, chains, bullwhips, and pipes. A white woman tripped Richard Sigh, age 12, with her umbrella, men then kicked him and beat him with pipes, breaking his leg at the hip. Another young boy was forced to run a gauntlet of cursing men, blood sheeting down his face. "That'll teach you, nigger," yelled one of the whites attacking him. "Don't come back tomorrow!"

A reporter overheard a white woman watching a gang of men whip a pig-tailed elementary school girl murmur to herself, "How can they laugh when they are doing it?"

The few cops in the area did nothing at all to halt the violence. A contingent of riot-equipped state troopers loitering around the corner took no action. FBI agents stood by writing in their little notebooks. They made no effort whatsoever to enforce the federal desegregation order, or the Civil Rights Act, or the U.S.

Constitution, or to protect innocent children from brutal attack. When asked by a reporter what they were doing, one replied that they were "investigating" to "determine whether any federal laws or court orders had been violated."

Braving the danger and violence, almost a third of the 250 Black kids managed to make it into the temporary safety of the school buildings. The mob didn't follow them inside — probably out of concern that in narrow building corridors white children might accidentally be injured by their violence.

The remaining Afro-American children, bruised, bleeding, and terrified, retreated back to Belle Flower, which now resembled a war zone first-aid station more than a place of worship. In a total failure of foresight, we had made no preparations for anything like this — nothing at all. Other than singer Joan Baez and nonviolence advocates Ira and Susan Sandperl who were volunteering in Grenada to support the Movement, there were no outside observers. Nor were there any MCHR volunteer doctors or nurses on hand to care for the wounded. SCLC staff and parents had to pitch in with emergency first aid and ferrying the badly injured to a hospital in the all-Black town of Mound Bayou more than an hour distant.

Given the long history of anti-integration mob violence ranging from Little Rock to New Orleans, Clinton to Tuscaloosa, there was no excuse for our failure to anticipate the possibility of a mob attack on Black schoolkids. Looking back, all the warning signs and portents were there for us to see, but we had become so fixated on our marches as the danger point that it never occurred to us that children going to school might be so brutally attacked.

Back on South Line Street, reporters and photographers were still trying to cover the first mass integration of a Mississippi school system. Most of them were southerners themselves but that didn't prevent them from being viciously set upon by the enraged white mob. Bloody and battered, they too fell back to the precarious safety of Belle Flower.

Mississippi counties are divided into districts, called "beats," each of which elects a constable who is sort of a junior sheriff. Beat 1 included the town of Grenada, and its constable was Grady Carrol. Of all the county's lawmen, he was the most hostile to Afro-Americans, the Freedom Movement, and the news media. "Some of the newsmen needed a cleaning," he later explained to a New York Times reporter. "If they tell a lie, they need a whupping from anybody who wants to give it to them."

Later that day, Mississippi Governor Paul Johnson "deplored" the assault on local southern reporters and photographers, "It is bad enough for hoodlums to attack with the intent to do violence upon any news personnel. For the ignoramuses to attack our own people is unforgivable." He made no mention of adult men savagely clubbing children.

My assigned post that day was in the SCLC office at the rear of Belle Flower, manning our typewriter and noting down reports as they came in while others worked the phones alerting Atlanta, the Justice Department, and the news media. Normally we were happy to let journalists use one of our two phones, but that day we needed both lines to respond to the crisis, so they had to make do with a wall-mounted pay phone in the hallway. I remember one nationally famous TV reporter from a major TV network with blood dripping down his face and staining his suit. I won't mention his name, but he was screaming hysterically at someone on the other end that he wasn't going to set foot outside of the church until they provided him protection.

What about protecting school kids, I thought to myself but refrained from saying aloud.

A bit after 9:00am, Black SCLC staff members led the children who had retreated to Belle Flower on a march back to the two schools. Many of the student integrators were veterans of mass marches to the square, familiar with the group tactics of nonviolently enduring and prevailing over white violence, and the hope was that those techniques might get the kids through the mob. Since the purpose of the march was to protect the students and see them safely to school, the few white SCLC staff members, Joan Baez, and the Sandperls were asked to stand aside because it was thought that the presence of white allies would incite the racist segregationists to even greater fury.

I was despondent at being left behind. Those kids were my friends and I wanted to face the mob with them. I felt ashamed and guilty watching them march courageously into danger without me. But I knew that the argument against including us white "race traitors" was valid, so I accepted the decision and manned a desk instead of assuming my usual march marshal role. Though I hated it, it was the right thing to do. As I've mentioned before, self-discipline was one of the Freedom Movement's great strengths, one that unfortunately some of the movements of the later '60s tossed aside.

Alerted by the cops, the mob was ready and waiting for the march, brutally attacking en masse. The SCLC staff members leading the line were targeted and beaten, some so badly they had to be hospitalized. Emerald Cunningham, the girl lamed by polio who walked with a pronounced limp and who had previously been attacked by troopers up on the square, couldn't escape. She was beaten down in the street, kicked, and clubbed with a lead pipe. A Klansman held a pistol to her head, "Nigger!" he screamed, "I'll shoot your brains out!" She had to be hospitalized for her injuries, as did other children with broken bones and bloody wounds.

A police officer watched the whole incident and laughed. FBI agents took notes — no doubt to aid their "investigation" into the possibility that someone might be violating a federal court order.

Finally, though, the local cops did move into action. They arrested SCLC member Lula Williams for "felonious assault," based on a complaint by the white woman who had beaten her with an umbrella the previous evening during the march to the square. Grown men who brutally assaulted Black children with baseball bats and steel pipes were allowed free rein, but Lula was held on \$1,000 bail (equal to \$7,600 in 2018).

Meanwhile, the 80 or so Afro-American kids who had managed to elude the mob earlier that morning were now trapped inside the two schools, surrounded by violent whites on the outside and threatened by hostile white students and teachers on the inside. That first-day session was scheduled to end at noon, by which time the mob had grown larger as they waited for Black children to be forced out through the doors by the school authorities.

Desperate to protect the kids from the white mob, SCLC staff, local movement leaders, and Black parents tried to reach the schools before the noon closing but were halted by rifle-armed Mississippi State Troopers who were blocking the surrounding streets. The troopers barred Afro-Americans, but gave free access to whites. Meanwhile, a truckload of club-wielding white men turned their attention downtown, attacking R.B. Cottonreader and a group of boycott pickets, injuring several.

At noon, one of the principals summoned all the white girls and the younger white boys to a location in the school where they'd be protected and safe. The older white boys were allowed to leave, either going home or joining the mob. Then he ordered the Black boys and girls of all ages out of the building, forcing them into the mob which viciously assaulted them. Dedicated freedom marcher Dorothy Allen, age 16, had to race through a gauntlet of violent attackers, as did Pointdexter Harbie, beaten bloody in the face. A Black child's skull was fractured, sending him and others to hospital with broken bones and internal injuries.

As Nina Simone sang it so well, "Mississippi Goddam!"

[As an historical side note, Dianna Freelon, then 16, was one of the children attacked and beaten that day by the white mob. In 2004 she was elected mayor of Grenada in an election where two white candidates split the white vote. She served one term in office before whites coalesced around a single challenger to oust her.]

No communication channels existed between the Black community and the white power structure, so there was no dialogue of any kind. For hints and clues about what the whites were thinking and planning we relied on rumors passed to us by Black maids and janitors, who reported what little they overheard from their bosses.

For their part, the white power structure relied on their Afro-American snitches to inform them of what we were up to and why. Some of those snitches

were motivated by money or favors, others were coerced by blackmail. The Black snitches were able to attend our mass meetings and some of them might have had access to the deliberations of SCLC and GCFM leaders. Yet I suspect they tended to tell whites in power what they thought the whites wanted to hear rather than annoy them with unpalatable truths. In any case, we always assumed that we lived and worked in a fishbowl with no expectation that anything we did or planned could be kept secret from "The Man."

According to our janitorial sources, that evening hundreds of furious whites jammed the City Council meeting to rage against school integration and even the minimal (mostly imagined) passive protection that police presence had granted Black children. "You get the highway patrol out of here and in twenty-four hours there won't be a nigger left!" shouted one man.

To placate the hardliners, who were obviously once more back in control, the Council fired "moderate" City Manager McEachin, who had originally devised the failed strategy for easing the Meredith March through Grenada without sparking protests by local Afro-Americans. Based on what we could glean from the rumors passed on to us, he was purged because he exhibited insufficient enthusiasm for mob attacks on children.

Later, a huge white mob numbering more than a thousand filled the square waiting for our regular march. But by then the national news media was breaking the story of school children and reporters savagely attacked by white racists while law enforcement did nothing.

Once again, that put pressure on state officials in Jackson. The officer in charge of the state trooper contingent promised that if we didn't march that night his men would protect the children going to school the next day. Of course we put no faith in his assurance, we'd heard that "we'll protect you tomorrow" song and dance before. But more than 100 of the 250 kids who had tried to attend the white schools were still determined to persevere despite the danger and we knew we had to do whatever we could to help protect them — even if it meant grasping at straws. So, based on a promise we trusted not at all, we reluctantly agreed to cancel the march.

We put out the word that no Afro-American students should walk to school on their own. Next morning, Tuesday the 13th, more than 100 courageous Black elementary and high school students gathered at Belle Flower to be driven by Afro-American adults willing to risk mob assault and damage to their cars. Again the white mob had the schools surrounded and again they attacked any Blacks who approached, smashing car windows with baseball bats and steel pipes. State troopers, local lawmen, and FBI agents again watched the violence and again did nothing to stop it. At least 10 kids were seriously injured and many vehicles were damaged. Yet despite the violence, a good portion of the students managed to

maneuver through the mob, enduring the blows and curses to defiantly enter the two school buildings.

A swarm of journalists and TV crews from around the world were now recording the mob's every action and law enforcement's utter inaction. Again, reporters and photographers were attacked. Again, the cops did finally bestir themselves to arrest someone — SCLC staff member Major Wright, who was on the sidelines, observing and reporting back to us. He was busted for "trespass." A civil rights lawyer, also there to observe, began speaking to Constable Grady Carroll, who called over members of the mob, who then rushed in and beat the lawyer with fists and clubs.

Meanwhile, out in the world, reports and TV footage of Monday's mob attack on schoolkids were being printed and broadcast across the globe. Intense political pressure from business interests both inside and outside the state was now coming down on Mississippi and its governor. Around noon, word began to circulate that he had *finally* ordered the troopers to actually protect the children. That word was passed to the mob leaders. Obedient as ever to the white powers-that-be, the violent throng around the schools quickly dwindled down to a few disgruntled diehards.

Classes ended around 3pm. Led by Dr. King, who had flown down from Chicago, a hundred or so Black adults and civil rights workers marched out of Belle Flower in as large a group as we could muster to escort the students through the mob that we assumed was still lurking in ambush. This time white SCLC staff and volunteer supporters were allowed to participate.

Rifle-armed troopers stopped us at their barricade a couple of blocks from the two schools. Their orders were that no one but students and parents were allowed through. They assured us that from now on they would prevent attacks on the children. We had no reason to believe them (and every reason not to), but there was no way we could force our way through a heavily armed blockade.

We waited anxiously until the kids safely came out through the barricade and told us that the mob was gone. We all marched back to Belle Flower together singing freedom songs and feeling victorious at having survived a second day of integrated school with pride and dignity.

Later that afternoon, an Afro-American who worked at the tiny local airport came to the church with an amusing story. Constable Grady Carroll had heard that two plane loads of newsmen were flying in on a pair of private jets. He gathered his posse of thugs and toughs to give them the kind of welcome he had been handing out to reporters and photographers at the schools.

It didn't go as planned though. Instead of tweedy writers, a dozen hefty, tough-looking guys in casual attire stepped off the plane. They didn't appear to be worried about trouble from Grady's gang. In fact they seemed to be looking forward to it — eagerly. Grady and his posse slunk away without a word. A TV

producer we were friendly with clued us in. Two of the three broadcast networks had reached out to Mayor Daley of Chicago who was happy to oblige the gatekeepers of public opinion. At his request, a band of Chicago cops had "voluntarily" taken "leave of absence" to protect network camera crews from mob attack.

That night the evening march was small, only 170 or so and as usual mostly women and children. Wounds and injuries prevented some of the regular protesters from participating and others were frightened by the mob. Those who did march concealed their fear behind a shield of spirited singing. When we reached the square a throng of 500 or more whites were waiting for us with rocks, bottles, bats, and pipes. No cops or troopers were visible. None at all — a silent but eloquent invitation to mob violence. As we circled the green we were bombarded by a hail of thrown missiles and links of steel chain shot from slingshots.

Back in those days, TV cameras capable of filming at night were big, bulky contraptions that had to be strapped to the cameramen with struts and braces making it almost impossible for them to run or dodge attacks. Covering the action on the square were two TV camera crews, each one surrounded by six Chicago cops who were hunched down like linebackers ready to spring out against anyone who threatened the photographers who were filming over their heads. They moved in unison as a squad, like a football team's defensive line. We, of course, had no such protection. But we found their antics amusing.

Singing our hearts out, we circled the green two or three times. By the end, a number of us were bleeding from stones and chain links. I was in my usual position as the rear marshal and I kept expecting the mob who so outnumbered us to physically assault our line. But somehow in the face of our unity and singing most of them were psychologically unable to do so — at first. On our third lap around the green a gang of enraged whites suddenly charged into the front of the line with clubs and fists swinging. The tightly packed protesters took the blows on their shoulders and raised their arms to protect their heads as they kept on marching. A squad of troopers reluctantly came around the corner to push the attackers away and hold them back.

On Wednesday morning, September 14, some 86 children of all ages were still willing to brave the mob and the implacable hostility of white students and teachers. They were determined to win at all cost, to defeat their white racist enemies and not give an inch. This was not, of course, out of any great burning desire to sit next to white children in class. Rather they were simply fed up with being treated as inferior, being told they weren't "good enough." They understood, respected, and deeply appreciated the academic fundamentals and self-pride that courageous Black teachers surreptitiously taught them in defiance of Mississippi's white education authorities. But they were no longer willing to

endure the kind of "sharecropper education" that the state forced upon the segregated Colored schools.

The previous day, while the mob was attacking cars carrying Afro-American kids, the police were carefully noting down the license plates of those driving children to school. For the rest of the day cops harassed them with bogus citations for imaginary traffic infractions. So our new strategy was to assemble at Belle Flower and march with the children to school en masse. The march was stopped at the trooper barricade two blocks from the schools. Though there were some white hecklers nearby, there was no mob. None of the children were attacked as they approached the school doors. The small march to the square that night was well protected by troopers and the waiting mob was subdued, limiting themselves for the most part to verbal abuse.

Movement lawyers had, of course, immediately complained to Judge Clayton in Oxford about mob violence thwarting his desegregation order. Classes were canceled on Thursday the 15th so that school officials could appear in federal court. The next day he issued a sweeping injunction ordering the county and city of Grenada and the state of Mississippi to protect children on their way to and from school. For this "intrusive federal interference with states' rights" he was roundly condemned and vilified by white politicians.

Now that troopers were finally protecting students from mob attack, some 160 kids showed up at Belle Flower for the Friday morning march to school. But 25 were sent home by school officials because of minor technicalities in their paperwork. That evening there was no mob in the square waiting for the night march. We didn't know whether the white power structure had gone back to its "no audience strategy" or they were having trouble keeping their mobs mobilized.

We of SCLC, local Movement leaders and activists, and the Afro-American community at large were all buoyed up by a sense of great achievement. Black Grenadians had defied and endured daily assaults at both school and square from raging Klan-led mobs. Now the mobs were gone while we were still marching and Black kids were still attending the white schools. On Sunday, Dr. King addressed a mass meeting jam-packed with more than 650 people. Three times the normal 200 or so participated in the night march to the square including many adults who had never marched before. Afro-Americans saw it as a victory march — and so did many whites though they refused to acknowledge it. It felt good, it felt really, really good.

Over the next week some of those rejected for technicalities were able to get enrolled, others weren't. When it finally settled down, out of the 450 Afro-Americans who had first asked for "Freedom of Choice" transfers in September, about 150 ended up attending the two white schools. While 150 was only a third of the original number, it was far greater than the number of Blacks attending any other integrated school in Mississippi.

On Saturday, September 18, the FBI arrested 13 whites on conspiracy charges for organizing the mob attack on the first day of school. One of them was Judge Ayers who had jurisdiction over many of the civil rights arrest cases in Grenada. He was the one we would have had to appear before had we decided to appeal our "singing on the south side of the telephone building" conviction.

A year later, in 1967, those 13 racists were finally tried in federal court for mobbing schoolchildren. The evidence was overwhelming. The kids identified their attackers from the witness stand. Under oath, two white policemen gave reluctant testimony against the defendants, as did the principal of the white high school. The defense arguments offered to refute the charges were utterly pathetic, some of them claimed they weren't there that day despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. One man who was accused of kicking a Black child in the face told the court, "The boy fell down at my feet and grabbed at my breeches — when the boy grabbed my leg I fell backward and my leg went up."

It took only 30 minutes for an all-white jury to acquit each and every defendant on every single charge.

Grappling With Poverty ~ 1966

From its commencement in early July, the "Blackout" boycott of Grenada's white merchants had been highly effective, cutting deep into their sales and profits. But groceries were our weak link in sustaining it. The few Black-owned stores were small "mom & pop" operations whose product selection was far smaller than at Pak'N Sak, Grenada's main grocery store (white owned, of course). And because the small Afro-American stores were overcharged by white wholesalers their prices were higher. The nearest town with a large market was Greenwood a 45 minute drive each way. Some Afro-Americans in Grenada had cars but many did not, nor did they have spare coin to share the cost of gas. So a good number of Black families simply had no choice but to sometimes shop at white-owned markets.

SCLC leader Hosea Williams proposed that members of Grenada's miniscule Black business and professional strata build an Afro-American owned "supermarket" to compete with Pak'N Sak. With seed money from the United Auto Workers union plus stock purchased by local folk, B&P Enterprises Inc. (for "Business & Professional") came into existence. The board of directors consisted of Rev. Sharper Cunningham who was pastor of Belle Flower and the main GCFM leader, a principal of one of the two Colored schools, a Black teacher, and the coach of the Black high-school's football team.

An empty lot at the north end of Main Street near the Yalabousha River bridge was purchased from an Afro-American landowner. Supervised by SCLC staff member Jim Bulloch (a former engineer), construction work on a 6600

square-foot concrete block building was begun. (For comparison, today's modern urban "supermarkets" average around 40,000 square feet, but a typical Black-owned "mom & pop" store of the 1960s was usually between 200 and 500 square feet, so the label "supermarket" was not an exaggeration for that time and place.)

Building a Black-owned market fit into a broader context of addressing poverty and unemployment through economic development, political organization, coops, and unions, that the Freedom Movement as a whole was beginning to address. By '66, it was clear that overt, legally-sanctioned segregation would soon be ended (or at least greatly diminished) and Afro-Americans would be registered to vote in large numbers. But most Blacks were still going to be poor and economically dependent on whites. As Hosea and many other SCLC leaders saw it, one way to address economic issues was to build up an Afro-American middle-class of business owners who would serve their community and provide decent jobs to other Blacks. (By contrast, Dr. King was moving towards building a broad political campaign against structural inequality and the economic roots of poverty.)

Elsewhere, SCLC was experimenting with a variety of economic-oriented programs. Led by Jesse Jackson, "Operation Breadbasket" in Atlanta and Chicago used the threat of consumer boycotts to force white employers to start hiring Afro-American workers. And back in the Alabama Black Belt, Albert Turner was organizing the Southwest Alabama Farmers Cooperative Association (SWAFCA) to empower and sustain Black landowners.

In Louisiana, Alabama, and other areas of Mississippi, similar economic empowerment efforts by SNCC and CORE were being undertaken within the ideologic framework of "Black Power." SCLC didn't use that terminology but rhetorical aspects aside, the actual programatic content of our efforts were not markedly different from those of CORE and SNCC.

In my own way, I too was trying to address economic injustice and inequality. Since I was not assigned to the supermarket project I began looking into the upcoming ASCS election — which everyone referred to as the "cotton vote."

The Agriculture Stabilization & Conservation Service (ASCS) was the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agency that distributed cash subsidies, crop allotments, low-interest loans, and other farm-related benefits (today it's called the Farm Service Agency). County-level ASCS committees were the ones who made the actual decision as to who got what (if anything). In the Deep South, those committees were all-white and their division of benefits between white and Black and rich and poor was profoundly unfair. As SNCC organizer and civil rights attorney Don Jelinek later described it:

The cotton allotments allocated to Blacks was less than that for whites, and less than strict formulas required. The subsidy payments for Afro-Americans wasn't paid at all, or was underpaid, or paid directly to the company store for the plantation owner to "adjust their account." The net result was that a white farmer and an Afro-American farmer could own or farm equal amounts of equal quality adjacent land, but the white would prosper while the Black went bankrupt and ended up working for the white. 22

In 1964 and 1965, SNCC and CORE activists in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana had organized campaigns to elect Afro-Americans to those county committees — with no success, not even in counties where Black farmers heavily outnumbered whites. In every state and every county, ASCS and USDA officials colluded with white landowners to blatantly rig the vote. Again in 1966, Movement organizers were waging ASCS campaigns in Mississippi counties neighboring on Grenada. By now SCLC's prohibition against whites canvassing in rural Grenada County had been relaxed, so I obtained materials from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in Jackson and began meeting with Black farmers and sharecroppers about the upcoming ASCS election.

But between the school crisis, the supermarket project, the ongoing blackout, and continuing voter registration work, SCLC in Grenada County was spread thin. We didn't have the resources to take on the kind of major effort that an ASCS campaign would require. Since it wasn't something I could do on my own I had to drop it. And in the end, none of the much larger efforts by SNCC or CORE in other counties were able to overcome the ruthless chicanery of USDA officials who worked hand-in-glove with the plantation owners to maintain the status quo. (Racial discrimination by the USDA was so blatant that in later decades lawsuits by Black farmers against the agency resulted in compensation awards totaling more than a billion dollars.)

At the same time that white mobs were attacking schoolchildren in September, Pak'N Sak grocery filed a lawsuit demanding \$960,000 damages for "lost business" due to the blackout (equal to around \$7,500,000 in 2018). The named defendants were SCLC staff and GCFM leaders, three Afro-American churches, and all of the Black taxi drivers. I was one of the individual defendants named in the suit.

Under Mississippi law at that time, consumer boycotts were illegal. Economic boycotts by the White Citizens' Council against establishments that tried to operate on an integrated basis were never prosecuted, but "blackouts" and selective buying campaigns by Blacks protesting segregation and discrimination faced legal suppression under the law. In our view, the boycott law was an unconstitutional violation of free speech — and it was clearly enforced in a racially biased manner. So we had defiantly violated that law as an act of civil disobedience.

The lawsuit hearing began in early November. We were accused of organizing a consumer boycott of Pak'N Sak because of their segregation policies,

their discriminatory hiring practices, and their general support of white supremacy in Grenada — true that. Had we been in a federal court, our constitutional and selective-prosecution arguments might have carried some weight, but we were being sued in a local Grenada County court, and the hearing was the same kind of farce as my trial for singing on the wrong side of the telephone building.

A.G. Allen, the owner of Pak'N Sak, testified as the plaintiff (in other words, the prosecution against us). Under oath he admitted that he knew only three or four of the seventy or so people he was suing, had *never actually read* the suit, did not know who had written it, and knew nothing about the specific incidents alleged in it. Obviously, he and the lawsuit were being used by the white power structure to crush the boycott, prevent establishment of an Afro-American owned store that might compete against white-owned businesses, and financially cripple SCLC and the churches that were supporting the Movement.

Despite Allen's shaky testimony, the judge immediately ruled against us and issued an injunction prohibiting all boycott activities.

Movement lawyers appealed, but while we waited for the appeal to slowly work its way through Mississippi's judicial system the injunction remained in force. It prohibited leafleting or picketing to maintain the blackout and as a practical matter it wasn't possible to mount a sustained civil disobedience campaign to resist it. Activists who had previously been arrested for violating the anti-boycott law had been bailed out while their cases were successfully appealed on constitutional grounds, but when someone was arrested for violating an injunction, bail and appeals weren't allowed. So anyone arrested for violating the injunction would remain in the slammer indefinitely until the judge (in his infinite mercy) decided to let them go.

Some of the militant student protesters were willing to face indefinite incarceration — but not enough to "fill the jails" which is what it would have taken to successfully stymie the injunction. So we had to halt boycott picketing and leafleting. Without a Movement presence downtown the boycott waned and faded away — which was, of course, what the white power structure intended.

Meanwhile, the day-to-day grind of Movement work continued. Using a six-page "community survey" form, I canvassed door-to-door during the day. The form had questions about all sorts of information that might be useful to an organizer — names, addresses, economic matters, health, education, housing, church membership, and so on. Of course, no one had personal computers back then and there was no way to process, collate, or use most of the data we collected, so the survey was really just a pretext for long conversations with people about the details of their lives, their problems, and the issues that

concerned them. In other words, the nuts and bolts of traditional one-on-one, face-to-face community organizing.

Out of that canvassing I began organizing a Poor People's Committee. As was customary at that time, its titular head was a male minister (there were no female clergy in 1966), but all the active members and the real leaders were women — Mamie Wilmington, Senora Springfield, Essie Mullin, and Bulah Washington. Within a couple of weeks an average of 15 women were meeting regularly to discuss the economic issues that affected their lives and that of their neighbors. A few were schoolteachers, most of the others were maids or low-wage workers, but all of them were able to read and write fairly well, and their main concern was helping those lower down on the economic ladder than themselves.

Without question, Mississippi's welfare system was one of the very worst in the nation — deliberately so. It was designed to keep large numbers of poor Afro-Americans in such desperate economic straits that they would work for starvation wages on the cotton plantations during the short planting, chopping, and picking seasons — either as sharecroppers or day laborers. Since its purpose was labor force management rather than any effort to help people improve their lives or climb out of poverty, the state welfare system combined with the federal surplus "commodity" food program barely kept recipients alive on a few cents a day while forcing them to live in sharecropper shacks hardly different from slave-era hovels.

Every election cycle, the state's white power structure railed against "those lazy welfare bums." But for decades they themselves had been the chief beneficiaries of the tax-funded welfare system, because it maintained in place their seasonal labor force — at no direct cost to them. Had there been no welfare system they'd have had to pay their seasonal workers enough to survive year-round.

But now a fundamental shift was underway. The fields were being mechanized and the planters no longer needed large numbers of seasonal workers. The White Citizens' Council was providing them with low-interest loans to invest in machines and chemical weed killers that could do the work more efficiently and at lower cost than the abysmally low wages they paid their "field hands." And at the same time those same Black "hands" were beginning to register to vote, which threatened the land-barons' political domination.

So the old welfare system was no longer politically or economically beneficial to the wealthy planters — those who Dr. King referred to as "Bourbons." Now, instead of maintaining sharecroppers and field hands on the land, the Bourbons sought to drive them out of the state. Ever sensitive to shifts in the political winds, welfare officials were now intensifying their efforts to deny or

cut people's benefits, and they didn't hesitate to ignore their own rules and regulations to do so.

Grenada, both city and county, was part of that pattern. As soon as Afro-Americans in Grenada began demanding their human rights, local authorities stepped up efforts to economically force them out of the county.

From Marian Wright (today Marian Wright Edelman) at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in Jackson, I obtained a 70-page handbook explaining in plain English what Mississippi's welfare laws and rules were and how to oppose and appeal illegal or capricious denial of benefits. During the day I and members of the Poor People's Committee met with Afro-American welfare recipients about their experiences with the welfare department. And night after night the ladies of the committee studied the handbook and discussed how to use the information.

We formed three working teams. The first continued to reach out to welfare recipients, noting down their stories and problems, and preparing factual information for a U.S. Civil Rights Commission hearing scheduled for Jackson in 1967. The second team handled written correspondence and appeals with the welfare agency on behalf of recipients who had been unfairly treated. The third team, composed of the most bold and courageous women, accompanied applicants and recipients down to the welfare office to help them fill out the forms and to ensure that they received fair treatment and the benefits they were entitled to.

I did not accompany them when they went to the welfare office. My presence as a white "race traitor" would have provoked rage from the officials and possibly violence or arrests. And I knew it was crucial that the committee ladies confront and overcome the authorities on their own. Which they did. Their first victory was forcing the officials to obey their own rules allowing our advocates to accompany both applicants and people appealing decisions all the way through the process. With defiant courage they demanded that they be allowed to attend interviews and hearings and to help people with their forms — and they won! They, and the Afro-American community at large, were so proud of that victory.

Though the B&P supermarket endeavor was now more or less in limbo because of the lawsuit and lack of funds, it was still SCLC's primary economics-oriented effort in Grenada, so I was pretty much on my own with the Poor People's Committee. SCLC officials in Atlanta didn't oppose what I was doing, but neither did they support it with additional resources. The truth was that I was working the opposite end of the economic spectrum from SCLC's traditional focus on preachers, teachers, landowners and businessmen, and some of the Atlanta-based leaders seemed a bit bemused at the idea of working with people on welfare rather than the Afro-American leaders and elites they personally felt more comfortable with.

On the other hand, while I don't know if Dr. King was aware of what I doing (I doubt it), we all knew he was turning his attention towards poverty and developing ideas and plans that would eventually lead to the Poor People's Campaign. I suspect that was the one reason no one in the SCLC hierarchy ever questioned or openly opposed my work around welfare rights.

The Poor People's Campaign was Dr. King's last great effort and the one he was working on when he was killed. I believed then, and still do to this day, that King's assassination was planned and facilitated by powerful members of society and government because he was opposing the Vietnam War and trying to build an interracial coalition of the poor to fight for economic justice. No one I knew in SCLC — then or now — believed the "crazed lone gunman" assassination theory put forward by the FBI and other government officials.

Grit & Determination ~ 1966

As the summer heat waned and the weather turned to fall we continued to hold our nightly marches, but the number of participants gradually dwindled down to 100 or less. People were tired, worn out with protests, tension, arrests, danger, and economic retaliation by whites. And they were discouraged by the slow — essentially nonexistent — pace of change since "The Movement" had come to town. Despite the steadily rising number of Black voters, all aspects of power still remained exclusively in white hands. Every cop, public official, bureaucrat, and clerk was still white. And nothing had improved economically for Afro-Americans, while many had been fired or evicted as punishment for their Movement activity.

What *had* changed though — and profoundly so — was the Black community itself. Where once fear, subservience, and a sense of inferiority enforced by social custom, law, and violence had been dominant, now courage, pride, and self-respect were on the rise. Even Afro-Americans who personally took no active part in the Freedom Movement felt the change. And so too did whites who fought it, and resented it, but had no choice but to accept it because despite their ruthless efforts the old days of Jim Crow-style white supremacy were dying — killed by Black men and women, girls and boys who simply refused to endure it any longer.

Thursday, October 6th, marked the 100th mass march of the Grenada Movement. We made a special turnout effort and some 170 people participated. In defiance of the ordinance forbidding such activity, we held a rally at the courthouse. When the cops looked like they were about to bust us we quickly left. Spirits were temporarily lifted, but the persistent problem of dwindling participation remained.

On Saturday the 8th, for the first time ever not enough people showed up at the nightly mass meeting to hold a march. Our sense was that 75 was the rock-bottom minimum number we had to have for safety. If we didn't have at least that many we'd look so weak as to invite attack from spontaneous groups of hostile whites. Over the next ten days small marches of between 75 and 100 were held, but twice more we had to cancel for lack of marchers.

It was frustrating, painful, and deeply discouraging to watch the Grenada Movement's direct action phase wane away. As with the N-VAC campaign against Van de Kamp's in 1964, we were now reaching the limits of sustained direct action. We knew that if some crisis or atrocity temporarily reenergized people we might be able to resume protests for a while around that particular issue, but daily mass meetings and marches as a way of involving people in the Freedom Movement had run its course. We heard that McEachin had been rehired as City Manager, an indication that our faltering numbers and canceled marches had once again put the white "moderates" in ascendancy over the hardliners.

And at the same time, broader social currents were weakening SCLC as an organization. Nationwide, the urban uprisings, Black Power controversies, and the Freedom Movement's shift of focus towards issues of northern-style segregation, economic justice, and opposition to the Vietnam War were reducing financial contributions from white liberals. By summer's end it was clear that Dr. King and SCLC had suffered a strategic defeat in the Chicago Open Housing campaign. Too many of the northern liberals who had supported campaigns against southern segregation were unwilling to back desegregation efforts in their own back yard.

Moreover, King's growing prominence as an opponent of the Vietnam War was alienating important institutions and power brokers including national leaders of the Democratic Party and President Lyndon Johnson himself. With SCLC now struggling financially, bail money was no longer available for large, sustained civil disobedience campaigns, and the number of staff assigned to Grenada had dropped to fewer than half of those who had been there during the summer peak.

Meanwhile, the Afro-American children in the white schools were enduring intense, unremitting harassment aimed at pressuring them to drop out and resume their Colored education. While they no longer faced attack by white mobs outside the buildings, inside they were faced with daily battles for dignity and survival. White kids freely kicked and pushed Black kids in the halls, threw objects at them, cursed them, and called them "nigger," "jigaboo," "coon," and other insults.

School authorities did nothing to curtail student behavior or protect Afro-American children. White boys were allowed to carry knives, saps, and other weapons, but nonwhites were suspended for doing the same. Whenever an

Afro-American student had any kind of conflict with a white, the Black was punished — by mid-October, 40 had already been suspended or expelled as “troublemakers” — while the white kids got a wink and a nod from administrators and teachers.

Knowing what they faced, the young Afro-American school integrators dreaded going to school each day. By mid-October, 60 of the 150 or so who had managed to enroll at the beginning of the term had been driven out by indignities, physical attacks, harassment from teachers and administrators, and economic retaliation against their parents. But with raw courage, grit, and determination some 90 or so Black children still held out. They picked up their books each morning and walked into what had for them become halls of hell.

On Tuesday, October 18, there were two new incidents. At Horn Elementary an Afro-American boy had been sitting in the cafeteria with some white students. The principal ordered him to move and sit with the other Black kids. When he refused, the principal yanked him from his seat, ripping his jacket. At Rundle High the same day, Dorothy Allen — one of the most courageous and dedicated of the young freedom marchers — was punched by a white boy. She hit him back and was taken to the principal who ordered her to bring her mother to school the following day — an indication that she was about to be expelled.

That evening, we called an emergency meeting of parents to discuss what to do about the violence and harassment at the white schools. More than 100 parents showed up. They decided to send a delegation to accompany Dorothy’s mother to see the principal and to ask for formal meetings between parents and teachers. Twenty of those present courageously agreed to be part of the delegation.

On Wednesday, the principal refused to meet with the parents delegation or to set up any future meetings. He adamantly denied that any pattern of discrimination or abuse existed. He claimed he was willing to talk to *individual* parents about *specific* problems, but he refused to acknowledge the existence of issues affecting Afro-American students as a group. Nor was he willing to meet with more than one set of parents at a time. In other words, mothers and fathers of one child with a complaint could come before him as lone supplicants in traditional Jim Crow fashion, but not if they brought along anyone else to support them — or anyone who might later become a witness in a court of law.

That night the mass meeting was well attended for the first time in weeks. They decided to try to meet with the principal again on Thursday and if he refused, the Black students would walk out in protest on Friday. That night, more than 200 joined our march to the square, the largest number in some time.

On Thursday, the principal again refused to meet with any group of Black parents. On Friday at 10am the remaining 90 or so Afro-American students in the two white schools defiantly walked out to protest continuing abuse and harassment. Some 180 students at the two Colored schools also walked out in

sympathy. Later that afternoon, another delegation of parents tried to talk to both the principal and Grenada School Superintendent Wilborn, but troopers prevented them from reaching the campus — the first time that parents had ever been blocked.

Over the weekend, parents of the Black kids who walked out of both the white and Colored schools were notified that their children were suspended for ten days until November 1st. On Monday the 24th, there was a morning march of more than 200 parents and students to the white schools to protest the suspensions. The few SCLC staff members left in Grenada were spread thin, so thin that only three (not including me) were assigned to accompany the marchers.

When the march column was stopped by state troopers, they knelt down to pray. All 200 of them were arrested on some vague charge. Grenada didn't have cells for large numbers of arrestees, so those older than 15 were forced into open cattle trucks and taken to the notorious Parchman Prison an hour's drive into the Delta. Some of the younger kids were shipped to the Greenville jail, an hour and a half away, while others were locked up in Grenada City and County jails. The very young kids were released to their parents.

That afternoon another parents' delegation tried to meet with the principal of Lizzie Horn Elementary. He told them he "didn't want to talk to no niggers." On Tuesday the 25th, yet another delegation was turned away, and when they sat down on the sidewalk in protest some 30 or so were arrested.

Inside the prison cells, SCLC staff members Major Wright, Herman Dozier, and Bill Harris were brutally beaten by cops and guards, and Lester Hankerson never fully recovered from the savage assault he was subjected to. Tom Scarbrough, an agent of the secretive Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, was in Grenada covertly working with the white power structure to stymie and destroy the Freedom Movement. In one of the reports he wrote to his superiors in Jackson he noted:

"It is said they can't let [SCLC Director J.T. Johnson] out of Parchman because he's so beaten up he couldn't get up to get out." ²³

The beatings and arrests sparked an expanded boycott of the Colored schools as more and more Black students walked out in protest. More people were arrested on Wednesday and that night our march to the square just barely met the threshold of 75 because so many activists were now locked up in Parchman Prison and jails in Grenada, Greenville, Batesville, Water Valley, and Oxford.

By now our attorneys were back in court before federal Judge Clayton in Oxford informing him of the adamant white resistance to his school desegregation decree. He refused to order our people released from jail (as he legally could have), but our lawyers indicated that a deal was being worked out

behind the scenes to release most of those arrested. The next day all the students were released without bail. Bail on the local adults was reduced to \$54 each (equal to a bit over \$400 in 2018) but the charges against them were not dropped. And all the incarcerated SCLC staff — more than half of those assigned to Grenada — remained in the slammer because SCLC didn't have the cash to pay their much higher bail.

By this time, 2200 of the 2600 Afro-American students enrolled in the Colored schools were boycotting classes. White school officials were, of course, pleased that the 90 school integrators were both refusing to attend and under suspension. But having over two thousand Black kids out of school posed a serious problem because funding from the state was based on average daily attendance, so the student strike was costing them money. And having so many angry youths roaming free on the streets and potentially joining the ongoing protests and marches worried local authorities — as well it should have.

On Saturday, October 29, all those remaining in jail were finally bailed out, but white terrorism was again on the rise. SCLC project director J.T. Johnson and SCLC staff member Robert Johnson were shot at by a hidden sniper — fortunately his aim was poor and no one was hit. Some 160 people participated in our march to the square that night. Unable to sleep because of nervous tension, I pecked out my second and final poem on the old typewriter in our office at the rear of Belle Flower church:

GRENADA MARCH #107

Echoing songs on the square
White breath in cold night air
Black shadows, two by two
Marching strong, me and you.

*"Oh freedom, Oh freedom
Oh freedom over me...."*

Beneath a lonely streetlight
Children singing out at night.
The mobs are gone, for this time
And tension eases down the line.

*"...and before I'll be a slave
I'll be buried in my grave
and go home to my Lord
and be free-oh and be free..."*

Standing silent round the square
Troopers watch with hard, cold stare.
"Niggers on the march again.
Will they never end?"

*"...No more gassings, no more beatings
no more jailings, over me..."*

Around, around, the square we stride
Cold air filled with freedom's pride.
We'll keep marching side by side
till freedom gates are opened wide.

*"...and before I'll be a slave
I'll be buried in my grave
and go home to my Lord
and be free-oh and be free."*

It's quite on the square again
As one-oh-seven comes to end.
Proud, we march down Pearl Street
Back to church where we meet.

As you can see, I lack any shred of poetic talent but I was moved to say something and that's how it came out.

On Monday, October 31st, Judge Clayton began hearing our complaint about the school situation. Superintendent Wilborn admitted under oath that almost the entire Afro-American student body was boycotting the Colored schools and all the Black kids registered at the white schools couldn't return to class even if they wanted to because of his blanket suspension order.

At Clayton's request, our side agreed to call off the boycott on his assurance of a fair resolution of the issues. Black kids returned to the Colored schools but Afro-American students were still barred from the white schools. That night was Halloween and we said we considered it too dangerous to try marching to the square. In truth, with emotions cooling over the judge's promises, we didn't think we would have the minimum of 75 marchers we needed. In reluctant recognition of painful realities, we announced that henceforth we were discontinuing nightly marches in favor of marches "as needed."

The court hearing continued for the rest of the week and on Monday, November 7, Clayton issued his order. Parents and students were prohibited from demonstrating at the schools or organizing boycotts. The school system was ordered under threat of contempt to treat everyone equal regardless of race and to protect children from "violence, intimidation, or abuse." The superintendent was ordered to set up meetings between parents and teachers, but he was not required to meet with group delegations. A complaint system was put into place to handle disputes. While this was not a total triumph — and in fact, from our point of view it had serious shortcomings — it was viewed by both Blacks *and* whites as a victory for the Freedom Movement.

On paper, Clayton's ruling sounded fair and reasonable, but as with so many federal court orders in the South it failed to take into account the grim realities of racism, violence, and intimidation that Afro-Americans in Grenada faced. Under the details of his order, before Black parents could bring a complaint to him they had to first meet with the teacher to ask for resolution, then if that failed meet with the principal, and after that the superintendent. In real life, however, it required an act of defiance and courage (plus time off from work) for an Afro-American parent to confront *any* white person in authority over any complaint or grievance. And complainers were marked by whites as "troublemakers" who then become targets for retaliation.

So as a practical matter, Clayton's fine words had only a limited effect in reducing abuse in the white schools and the harassment continued. On December 20, Freedom Movement lawyers Iris and Paul Brest and Marian Wright sent a report to the parents of the school integrators:

Lawyers from our office spent Friday and Saturday speaking to many of the children still attending the formerly white schools in Grenada. And this is what we found. The Court's order requires the schools to protect your children "from violence, intimidation, or abuse." Your children tell us that in the last month-and-a-half, they have been subjected to all sorts of violence, intimidation, and abuse:

Every day white students kick and push your children, throw papers and spitballs at them, curse at them and call them names. Often this happens when a teacher is present, but the teacher does nothing to stop it.

One child was so badly injured when a white boy threw a metal object at him that he was hospitalized at Mound Bayou, and may require further treatment.

White students bring knives, brass knuckles, and other weapons to school. At least one white boy has actually pulled a knife on a Negro child. Some teachers and other school official continue to abuse the Negro students by calling them "niggers," and by making other derogatory comments.

At least one teacher has explicitly urged the white students to inflict physical harm on the Negro students.

Some teachers continue to make the Negro students sit together, in a segregated group.

Some teachers refuse to allow Negro students to recite in Class, and ignore them when their hands are raised.

Some teachers grade the Negro students unfairly, giving them low grades even when they do well.

Several Negro students have been suspended because of arguments or fights with white students; the whites were not suspended.

All the Negro children who were suspended from school during the week of October 24, were failed in all their courses for the second six-week period.

At the end of November all the Afro-American school integrators who had walked out of the white schools and been suspended in October were given "Failing" grades for that period. But criminal charges against those under age 13 who had been arrested for marching or picketing were dropped. Those over 13 pled "Not Guilty," with no date set for trial. So far as I know, no trials of any of those arrested for protesting the treatment of Black school children were ever held.

Grenada Today ~ 2018

November 8 was election day in 1966. In Grenada County some 1300 votes were cast for Clifton Whitley, a Black man running for the U.S. Senate on the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) ticket. James Eastland, the white incumbent, received around 3000 votes. Given the county's racial polarization, we interpreted those numbers to mean that more than 1300 Blacks went to the polls that day. While that Afro-American vote was only 30% of the total, for a county that had no more than a handful of Black voters before the Meredith March just four months earlier, it was a huge step forward. (Eastland, of course, won the state-wide election as everyone knew he would.)

Over the cold wet winter that followed, sporadic violence, intimidation, arrests, and racial tension continued, but at a lower level than during the summer and fall. We held occasional marches to the square of 75–200 people but daily direct action protests were no longer possible. After months of constant protests, jailings, and beatings, on most nights we simply didn't have the minimum number of 75 for a march. So the direct action phase of Grenada County's freedom struggle faded away as all such protest campaigns inevitably do — though the threat of resumed demonstrations on the part of the Afro-American community remained at least a theoretical restraint against unbridled excesses of white power.

With the injunction still in force it was impossible to sustain the boycott, so that too dwindled away. The B&P supermarket was never built and the land remains an empty lot today. Yet though the protest marches had come to an end, the legal work of defending those arrested and challenging the boycott injunction and the supermarket lawsuit in court continued. As did voter registration, political education, and organizing.

In the months and then the years that followed, Afro-American voter registration rose steadily until registration rates for both Blacks and whites were more or less comparable. But whites continued to hold a numeric majority and the electorate remained racially polarized — in 2016, Trump the Republican candidate won 57% of the vote, almost all of which were cast by whites, while Clinton the Democrat received 42%, almost entirely from Afro-Americans. In 2018, the U.S. Senate race resulted in a similar 57% to 42% split.

Yet even though Afro-American voters in Grenada continue to be outnumbered by whites, in the ordinary course of civic government Afro-Americans now have a voice. Over time they became numerous enough to first influence city and county elections and then elect Black candidates from wards and beats with Afro-American majorities. Today, two of the five county supervisors are Black and the city council shows similar racial diversity. Most of the streets in Afro-American neighborhoods are paved and some have sidewalks. There are Black men and women working in government offices and wearing badges in patrol cars. All of which had been utterly unthinkable before the Freedom Movement marched into town on June 15, 1966.

Where once more than 70% of Grenada's Afro-American population lived in poverty, today only a third of them exist below the federal poverty line. By comparison, just 17% of the white population is officially "poor," a ratio not all that different from the 1960s. The town's Black neighborhoods are now filled with empty lots where once impoverished slum shacks were jam-crammed side by side on muddy lots. The narrow Union Street block where Chat & Chew used to do business, and where we held our voter rallies squeezed into the narrow street by storefronts and porches, is now mostly open — and devoid of businesses.

The drop in Black poverty (as officially defined) can be traced mostly to the ending of the old Jim Crow, hand-labor system of plantation agriculture which relied on masses of Black field hands enduring a form of feudal-like peonage. On the other hand, at least some of the increase in Afro-American income levels can be attributed to the Freedom Movement's partially successful campaigns against employment discrimination and exploitation. Today, for example, Blacks are paid wages rather than miniscule "shares" or plantation store "credits." While steadier, better-paid jobs are still more likely to be filled by whites, and lower-wage and part-time employment is the lot of most Afro-Americans, the number of Blacks with middle-class jobs and livelihoods has significantly expanded since 1966. And not just in numbers, but also in the types of occupations now open to Afro-Americans, such as store manager, municipal employee, utility lineman, and so on.

When the Freedom Movement arrived in Grenada in the summer of 1966, both county and town were rigidly segregated into separate and distinct worlds — one Black, one white — a separation ruthlessly enforced by custom, law, economic power, and terrorist violence. Today in 2018, most Grenadans still live in racially separate worlds, but now that separation is primarily the result of custom, social pressure, and economic barriers rather than naked force. White and Afro-American students, for example, tend to patronize the local movie theater on different nights, and during the sweltering summer season it's mostly Blacks who use the public swimming pool while whites pay \$195 for the private Kiwanis pool.

Grenada's public schools are now fully integrated, with Afro-Americans a slight majority. The children of affluent whites attend the private Kirk Academy while white kids from less well-to-do families share academically integrated but socially self-segregated public school classrooms with Blacks. Even by Mississippi's low standards, Grenada public schools are underfunded, and just a bit over half of those who enter high school end up graduating with a diploma. Private tuition at Kirk, which was founded in 1966 at the time of the school integration crisis, is close to \$5000 per year, 98% of its students are white, and it prides itself on offering a "Christian-based" education.

Yet while social segregation, discrimination, and racial disparities in income, education, and political power still persist, life for Afro-Americans in Grenada has fundamentally changed for the better. Today, Black Grenadans are part of "*We the People*" with enough political power to force both the power structure and whites in general to acknowledge their civic rights and respect their human dignity. For younger generations who grew up assuming that such is the birthright of all Americans that may not sound like much, but it's a far cry and a huge step forward from a society founded on Judge Taney's edict that *a negro of the African race had no rights which the white man was bound to respect*.

And a Song Shall Rise

Sometimes I'm asked, how did we endure? And what kept us going? My answer is — freedom songs and freedom singing. Freedom songs and freedom singing were our most effective nonviolent weapon, and the songs and the singing were the psychic threads that bound us into a tapestry of purpose, solidarity, courage, and hope.

The songs spread our message,
The songs bonded us together,
The songs elevated our courage,
The songs shielded us from hate,
The songs forged our discipline,
The songs protected us from danger,
And it was the songs that kept us sane.

Singing those songs suffused each of us with the summed power of our whole. And not just on picket lines and freedom rides but day to day in the community as a whole. They wove into a single Freedom Movement the adults who sang them in mass meetings, the young militants who carried them into jail, and the impoverished maids, laborers, and sharecroppers who raised them in small circles of courage surrounded by seas of hate and danger.

Freedom songs were the vows we made, each to other, to stand side by side through all that we had to endure. They were the pledges we took to

struggle together for justice and freedom. As the furnace-fire turns iron into steel, singing our shared songs forged bonds of loyalty that for many of us have not withered with age over more than five decades. I'm writing this in the season of the 50th anniversaries and at every reunion, for many of us, singing those songs together still brings tears of joy and remembrance to our eyes.

The songs also carried and shaped our message. College teaches us that political movements are primarily about the intellectual content of statements, speeches, positions, and proposals. But what the Civil Rights Movement taught me was that social and political struggles — popular mass movements — are as much, or more, about emotion as they are about ideology and it was our songs that released and expressed that emotion.

The songs inspired and encouraged us, yes, but they were also consciously used as practical tools for focusing and guiding the emotional contours of events, meetings, protests, even jail time. Different songs, different verses of the same song, and differences in the tone and style of the singing all evoked different responses. Like an artist using color to alter the mood of an image, skilled song leaders sensitive to the moment used freedom songs to shape and direct the emotions experienced by both ourselves and those within the sound of our voices.

And on occasion the songs even protected us from imminent violence. Time after time on the Grenada Square when we were confronted and outnumbered by Klan-led mobs armed with baseball bats and steel pipes, our songs held us together. And often — not always, but often — our singing literally prevented them from charging into us with their clubs swinging. I know that sounds impossibly mystic and fanciful, but it's true. I saw it. I experienced it.

I so vividly remember those night marches during the school crisis when white mobs filled the outer perimeter of the square. The most angry and hate-filled were clustered along the Doak Street side. As we marched around the green singing with every ounce of energy and passion we could muster we had to circle again, and again, and again, past that one spot where they were most intensely trying to break into our line. Most of the time they couldn't do it. They simply couldn't do it. In some way I can't explain our singing and our sense of solidarity created a kind of psychological barrier between us and them, a wall of moral strength that they couldn't physically push through to attack us with their clubs and chains, as they so obviously wanted to do.

It wasn't visual, it wasn't something you could see, but I could sense that our singing and our unity was holding them off, pushing them back. It was most obvious when we passed that wedge they made on the north side of the square. The Klan leaders surged forward off the sidewalk and into the street, trying to push into us. They got within a few feet of us, but they couldn't get closer. By our singing, we psychologically pressed them back. Most of the time, the only way

they could strike at us was to bombard us from a distance with thrown rocks, chain links, and cherry bombs. But if for some reason we stopped singing, even for just a moment, it was like a bubble broke. Then they charged into us with clubs and fists swinging.

Grenada wasn't the only place I saw and experienced that kind of song-power. I saw the same thing that cold January night in 1964 when we held the Wich Stand picket line between white teenagers hurling eggs and verbal abuse at us on one side and a furious throng of neighborhood Afro-Americans on the other side. To this day I'm convinced that it was the psychological barrier we built with our singing that kept the white teenagers from charging into us and neighborhood Blacks from rolling over us to get at the white racists.

Freedom singing, however, was different from performance singing. Participation was its essence — not the entertainment quality of the music. Everyone was expected to sing. I won't hide this, I can't sing a lick. I'm tone-deaf. In fact, I was notorious as the worst singer in N-VAC and later the worst singer in SCLC. But I sang loud, and when danger threatened I was often the one who led the singing, not because of the (off-key) quality of my voice, but because I knew how to use song as a tactical tool, which is what was needed in those moments.

Song was also one of our most powerful and effective organizing tools. All human communities are riven with divisions — personal, social, political, religious, cultural, class, gender, age, sexual-orientation, and of course race. Building unity across these many divides is hard. Really hard. Rich and poor, elite and "no account," don't mingle easily. Individuals might be at odds with other individuals. Someone from one race or culture may feel unwelcome or out of place in settings dominated by a different race or culture. Singing our songs together helped break those barriers down.

In any established group there's a natural tendency for newcomers to feel like outsiders in cold distant orbit around the warmth of the "in crowd." For the Freedom Movement of the 1960s nothing was more effective in breaking down individual isolation and making newcomers feel welcome than singing freedom songs. And when I was doing voter registration and organizing in the South, time after time folk showed up for the singing and stayed for the struggle.

I am also convinced that singing our songs held us together politically. Looking back now from a distance of more than 50 years, I don't recall much (if any) singing at L.A. CORE meetings. Maybe the general membership meetings ended with "We Shall Overcome," but I don't remember any singing in the work and committee meetings. But in N-VAC and SCLC (and SNCC and the southern CORE chapters, too) every gathering of any size began and ended with songs.

You know, they say that talk is cheap, and of course that's often the case. But talk can also be agonizing, wrenching, and divisive. When our meetings

were filled with bitter contention, when jealousy, frustration, and anger poisoned the air, we sang our freedom songs together and somehow eased our discord and reknit our tattered unity, even when the underlying conflicts remained unresolved. And we discovered that beginning a meeting with song started it from a place of unity, and ending every meeting the same way helped keep us together. Perhaps if L.A. CORE had done more singing and less factionating it would not have split in two.