

Difficult to Organize the Poorest and the Wealthiest Among Negroes . . .

By John Perdue

In case you should wish to introduce this article you should know that I am 21, a student on leave from Harvard College, a field worker with SNCC. I've spent five months in southwest Georgia, partly in Albany and partly in Americus. I spent 20 days (June 19-July 9) in jail in Albany on charges of disorderly conduct, defacing public property, resisting arrest, and assault with intent to murder. I was released on \$1900 bond (cash). I spent 85 days (August 8-Nov. 1) in Sumter County jail on charges of inciting to insurrection, interfering with a lawful arrest, rioting, unlawful assembly, and assault with intent to murder (state charges) and resisting arrest and disorderly conduct (city charges). I was released by order of a three-judge panel of federal judges on \$2100 bond, which declared the insurrection and unlawful assembly statutes unconstitutional and all eight peace warrants lodged against me invalid. The court is in recess and will convene again after Dec. 1 to decide whether to issue an injunction restraining local officials from depriving people of their civil rights under color of law.

Participants in the civil rights movement today are not given to utopianism, but a theme which lies behind picket lines, mass demonstrations, and arrests is the attempt of American blacks to feel the pain of oppression which they have so long suppressed and find the strength to overcome it.

This became painfully apparent to me during my three month stay in the Sumter County Jail in Americus, Georgia, on charges of inciting to insurrection. One of the black prisoners there, a man in his forties, could not stop calling me "sir", even after I tried for several weeks to break his habit. For him the pain of communicating with me, a white, was so great that he avoided me as much as possible even though he knew I was in jail because of civil rights work. The way to relationships of mutual respect between white and black is blocked by deep counter currents in the personalities of, I would say, the majority of Southern blacks.

Still Jim Crow Despite ICC

Surface events in the racial struggle mean little until one can understand why, in Albany, Georgia, in spite of an ICC ruling which ended segregation in the bus terminal there, few blacks use the formerly "white" waiting rooms. After two years of mass demonstrations, boycotts, and voter registration, Albany blacks have little to show for their suffering in official desegregation, and the balance weighs heavily against even casual integration. The scale of success, however, is the people's state of mind, and there are at least several hundred blacks in the city who can now face a white man without the need to feel servile. These are the ones who have faced beatings, jail and the wrath of the white man with aggressive non-violence and have experienced at least temporary unity in the long-divided Negro community.

There is at least one basic institution through which Southern blacks (I use "black" rather than "colored", which is the euphemistic word attached to segregated facilities) attempt to release and rectify the frustrations which result from inferior status. Country churches in particular have evolved a "language" of music and preaching and patterns of intense emotional possession which are baffling and embarrassing to whites used to more formal and "rational" means of religious expression. The elaborate, shifting chords and embellishments of a "common meter" hymn; the rising cadence of the

We asked one of the Americus Four to write his story for us and we are proud to present in his own words the reactions of John Perdue of Denver to the situation in the South. It breathes an objectivity, a humanity and a selflessness characteristic of SNCC. This article is given new meaning by the news that a grand jury in Americus has reindicted Perdue along with the other three (Ralph W. Allen of Melrose, Mass.; Donald Harris of New York City and Thomas McDaniel of Americus) for assault with intent to murder and rioting. The widest possible public support must be mobilized for these heroic young men if the vindictive authorities of Americus are not to succeed in finding some way to keep them in prison for many years.—IFS

black in the pulpit singing the Word; the shouts of the old bent ladies in the Amen Corner; the pleading prayers of the grimacing deacon—all are media through which, I think, the most oppressed blacks may convince themselves that their afflictions represent the road to that "great gettin'-up mornin'".

The most talented and sensitive SNCC workers enter a country church and speak in the language of black religion but with the message that suffering, while a source of strength, is dehumanizing, that retreat only intensifies it. Black churches, for this reason and for convenience, become the site of mass meetings, the most regular feature of the Movement, and old hymns carry new words, themes such as "We shall not be moved", "We shall overcome", "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine".

A totally different reaction to segregation consists entirely in an attempt to be "white". Students at Negro colleges in the South, many teachers at all levels, some ministers with relatively wealthy congregations, and aspiring politicians and professionals deny their "roots" in black culture. Straightened hair, a flashy car, esoteric cultural tastes and formal, restrained church services become symbols of the escape. The result, in terms of the Movement, is that many, though certainly not all, of the upper classes in the Negro community will not actively identify themselves with the Movement.

In canvassing for voter registration I have found the most response from people in the middle ranges on the Negro income scale. The very poor are frequently afraid of me as a white (sometimes they will not answer the door, other times they will agree to everything the canvasser says in order to get rid of him). Or they are realistically or irrationally afraid that they will suffer eviction, firing, or even "legal" or physical intimidation. Ignorance and apathy as well obscure the connections in their minds between their personal failure to register and the fact that from top to bottom the "government is a white man". At the upper end of the scale, businessmen are threatened with white boycott, revocation of licenses, litigation, and property damage if they take an uncompromising public stand for black interests. Teachers, ideally a powerful force, usually in my experience succumb to subtle pressures from principals and the school board, much as teachers all over the nation willingly or not steer away from "controversial issues". All of these pressures reinforce the tendency to disavow "black roots" in a drive for respectability.

Only the most confident and aggressive leader can counteract the forces which maintain the status quo, for on the level

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What the Reviewers Are Saying About I. F. Stone's Book

"THE HAUNTED FIFTIES"

Donald Mintz in the Washington Star (Nov. 4):

"Mr. Stone's little journal . . . is one of a favored few small journals whose influence is greater than their subscription lists. . . . With in a few pages of the beginning of the book, all insidious notions of skipping here and skimming there vanish. . . . Mr. Stone's reports and polemics have survived very well indeed. . . . primarily because Mr. Stone is so remarkably clear minded . . . with a power of penetration that must make other commentators despair. . . . Genuine conservatives should enjoy Mr. Stone nearly as much as radicals."

Gerald W. Johnson in The New Republic (Dec. 14):

"His astonishing quality is not that he is independent but that, being independent, he has survived. . . . He is controversial in a day when controversy is equated with sin. He is bold, when courage is next door to treason. He is non-mercenary when indifference to money is close akin to forgetting God. He is extremely diverting when being amusing without being on television is usurpation."

Emile Capouya in The Saturday Review (Nov. 16):

"That one-man journal was founded in the days when Senator Joseph McCarthy was making the rules around here, and I suppose it is one of the reasons that McCarthy's triumph was not more complete in his lifetime, nor his heirs more firmly in power now. . . . Mr. Stone's reportorial prose is beautifully clear . . . clean as good French."

Quincy Howe in Book Week (Nov. 24):

"In this age of Hearst task forces, Time-Life writer-researcher-biographer teams, and Readers Digest condensations, I. F. Stone stands out as the embodiment of do-it-yourself journalism."

Senator Joseph S. Clark (D. Pa.):

"I am glad you have collected your pieces and given them this permanent form. It is our guarantee that there will be an alternative to the pap in tomorrow's history books, just as there is an alternative to the pap in today's newspapers in your splendid newsletters."

Wm. German in San Francisco Chronicle (Nov. 3):

"'The Haunted Fifties' . . . measures up to a remarkable vivisection of a nervous and stange decade. . . . The wonder and excitement of those 10 years comes back strongly as Mr. Stone's scalpel sifts through the weekly bits. . . . More power to this cheerful prophet."

Sam Galabow in the Charlotte (N.C.) Observer:

"This book is written by a man with a great sense of social justice. . . . It is amazing that one man can be so fearless and brave, that one man can refuse to tolerate cruelty and injustice, that one man can persevere in the search for truth, and that this same individual can also feel cheerful about the human race and believe that man ultimately will solve his problems."

Virginia Kirkus' (Book) Service (Oct. 1):

"It has been ten years since I. F. Stone has appeared in hard covers: a long time, indeed, and readers of this book are likely to agree both that it was much too long and well worth the wait. As a collection of contemporary articles on every conceivable political and moral aspect of the troubled times between Eisenhower's and Kennedy's first months in the White House, this volume is nothing short of astounding. What Stone saw so clearly and fought or advocated then, nearly everybody holds to be self-evident now . . . This is contemporary history of the finest, most readable sort."

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