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Mississippi Council on Human Relations

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the council newsletter

June 1971

vol. I no. 5

An outrage

There is no way to understand random, vicious violence. All that we know is that a young woman has been cut down just as she was prepared to emerge into the world, apparently the victim of an ageless racism which sees all blacks as fit targets and all whites as superior beings who have the right to do as they will with supposedly lesser breeds. The law can and must exact retribution from whomever is guilty of the truly horrible slaying in Drew, but the law cannot bring Jo Etha Collier back to life.

Her death reminds us how close we still are to the bad old days when white made right. That there may still be young white men who think it is amusing—and acceptable—to go cruising through black sections of town looking for trouble may not be too surprising, since that was once a standard pastime, but it is nonetheless deeply disturbing. That a young teenager was killed for absolutely no reason is a fact which is more than disturbing. It is sickening.

There is probably no way to prevent it,

but for once we whites should not allow ourselves the luxury of fingerpointing at other regions and other crimes. There is no excuse for what happened in Drew, no justification and no defense. It is unforgivable, brutal and shocking. Jo Etha Collier's death is an outrage, a moral blot on this region which will not be diminished by comparing what happens here with what happens anywhere else.

Trying and convicting her killers would not return the young high school graduate to her loved ones and friends, but it would at least help to lessen the shame of what has happened. There is no need to speculate on what a failure to find and convict her killers would mean, to white no less than to black Deltans. It is imperative that justice be done, and done speedily. Otherwise, what today can still be seen as an aberration, a throwback to a time we hoped to have left behind, will be seen instead as a clear indication of how little we have really progressed in our journey away from the virulent racism which has been our grievous affliction for so long.

May 27

Shameful silence

The President of the United States expressed his concern and outrage. The sheriff of Sunflower County showed his humanity, as did the mayor and police chief of Drew, by attending the funeral services for the slain Joetha Collier last Sunday. Our governor once again demonstrated his insensitivity to the needs of the moment and to simple human compassion by saying not a word at any time after the slaying of the young Drew High School graduate.

Not that John Bell Williams was alone in his silence or his inability to give witness to the brotherhood of all men. This district's congressman, good for a quote on anti-war demonstrators in Washington or crime in Los Angeles at the drop of a reporter's pencil, apparently decided that Drew is not on his political map. So did our lieutenant governor, whose hometown is not very far from Drew but who couldn't muster the elemental decency, or perhaps courage in this election year, to say a word of sorrow that we could find in

public print.

It is that silence which will be remembered by many Mississippians, white as well as black, almost as long as Miss Collier's murder. It will not go unremarked elsewhere, either, by those who need little excuse to brand all white Mississippians as barbarous racists who secretly applaud each black's death.

What could it have possibly cost our silent leaders to speak out against the tragic savagery of last week? Who can calculate what it might have meant to them, to this state, to all of us, if they had only been able to find words appropriate to the occasion?

They did not, however, and we must find a measure of redemption only in the reaction of several Sunflower County officials. If it had not been for them, the deafening silence which would have followed Joetha Collier's murder would have been at least as shameful as the murder itself. We do not deserve leadership so false to our better instincts.

June 3

The

Delta

Democrat-
Times

Hodding Carter III, Editor

Delta Democrat-Times
Greenville, Mississippi

Through Hazel Eyes

It is simply incredible that there are still men who yield to their base instincts and violate the laws of God and man by taking the life of another human being. It is even more incredible when the person killed has given no affront or offense.

Hazel Brannon Smith
June 4, 1971
The Northside
Reporter

A Drew High School senior, Joetha Collier, was murdered a few hours after she had received her high school diploma. She was hit by gunfire as she stood in front of a cafe in a black business section of town with friends. Three white men have been charged with her murder and are being held at Parchman Penitentiary, presumably for safekeeping.

A dozen or so whites attended the funeral rites held at the Drew High School auditorium, including the Mayor, the Sheriff and some other officials. A few years ago even this simple gesture would not have been made — white officials would not have attended, the school auditorium would not have been available for the funeral of a black, or possibly anyone. So we have come a little way — but we still have far to go.

By now there should be in this state such a climate of hostility for lawbreakers, for anyone who would do violence, that no person would dare to commit a murder, knowing he would be compelled by his fellow citizens to pay the full penalty. The fact that such a tragedy did occur is an indictment of all of us. Our responsibility as good citizens is to demand that the right to live is preserved and respected in our society.

Surely those who live in that Delta area are shocked and sickened by the murder, as were all decent people throughout the state and nation.

But the only way to show that Mississippians do not approve of such crimes is to make certain the guilty pay in full measure. The responsibility now rests with a grand jury of Sunflower County citizens — who must indict those responsible — and a Sunflower County Court which must try and find them guilty.

If public opinion does not tolerate criminal acts, the guilty will be punished. If criminals can commit such crimes and go free, no one is safe in his home or bed.

ANOTHER SICKENING SILENCE

The words on pages one and two of the Newsletter were written by editors known for their dedication to the causes of justice and human relations. We wondered what the rest of the Mississippi press had to say about the killing of Miss Joetha Collier.

Jan Grenshaw, the Council's summertime secretary, looked at every regularly published non-sectarian weekly and daily paper printed in this state between May 27 and June 4.

Only one other paper commented editorially.

*

"ON OUR BACK. "

This editorial responds to the state Attorney General's complaints about the U.S. Government and Civil rights attorneys being "on our back".

From the Vicksburg Evening Post, Tuesday, June 1, 1971

"Who Keeps Them 'On Our Back'?"

"...And yet, there is a rather sombre facet of our image of which we are not proud. Who, indeed has kept those elements 'on our back?' It was those who were implicated in the murder of Emmet Till, those who killed the three civil rights workers in the Philadelphia area, those who murdered Vernon Dahmer in Hattiesburg, those who burned churches and homes of blacks, and now those who murdered the black girl in Drew. "...One of the greatest problems we have to face in our state is to prevent such acts as the Drew murder from recurring, and this can only be done by a concerted effort on the part on all of our people of Mississippi to see that such incidents as mentioned above will never again blot the escutcheon* of Mississippi."

* Blot on one's escutcheon—a stain on one's reputation; disgrace.

Random House Dictionary of the English Language

Students Recall Jackson Killings

JACKSON, Miss.—Across Lynch Street, just at the edge of the Jackson State College, a five-foot chain-link fence, which was erected this academic year, prevents cars from driving through the campus. It is the most visible permanent reminder that two young blacks were shot to death by state and local police one year ago May 14. Traffic through the campus was one of the factors leading to the disruption that brought on the shootings.

Next to the fence is Alexander Hall, a women's dormitory, on whose lawn one of the young blacks died. The bullet-shattered window panes in the Alexander Hall stairway, where most of the police fire at a conjectural sniper was concentrated, has been removed. But bullet holes in the masonry of the building remain.

Outside Alexander Hall, on this past May 13, two thousand Jackson State students gathered to pay tribute to the memories of the two dead youths. Holding candles, the students marched across the campus to the front of the dormitory where James Green and Phillip Gibbs were fatally wounded and 11 others were shot.

And they sat down in the street, singing freedom songs that some of them had voiced first as young children, being carted off to jail in civil rights demonstrations of the past. More than 200 of the students remained through the night, wrapped in blankets and sometimes waking to sing, although the temperature was near 40 degrees. It was a moving spectacle.

But the students knew that no one had been punished for the killings, even though a presidential commission had found them to be "completely unwarranted and unjustified." And they also knew it was likely that no one ever would be punished. In Mississippi, although much has changed, white police officers can still kill black people and get away with it.

Students' reaction to that hard reality is difficult to gauge; there are many divergent streams among JSC's 4,700 students. Some, looking hard at what seems an immovable mountain of racism, appear to pretend that it isn't there. "They just want to graduate, party, and get into some bourgeois thing like teaching," says Gregory

Antoine, a junior from Pass Christian. He was later to become so upset by the frolicking atmosphere that prevailed for a while during the all-night vigil that he grabbed a bull horn and lambasted the students for forgetting "why we are here."

But other students, like Sandra McClairne, take a different tack. She is editor of the student newspaper and president-elect of student government. Although she believes that many of the students at JSC are "apathetic," she has not given up hope of arousing them to action and involvement.

"Even if it takes spoonfeeding," she said, "we're going to get them together and concerned. This year, for instance, we couldn't get them to vote in student government elections even though there were polls in the dorms. If it takes putting the polls in their rooms, then that's what we'll do."

Sandra and other JSC students met with RRIC and a representative of the *New York Times* off-campus. The press had been banned, by President John R. Peoples, because of his fear that reporters would distort the week-long commemoration, which began May 10.

Partly because of the press ban and partly because the national press does not appear to be very interested in remembering Mississippi killings, the anniversary slipped by almost unnoticed outside of Jackson. Only five outside reporters came to Jackson, a marked contrast to those who were present at similar ceremonies at Kent State University.

The theme of the week-long commemoration was "Where do we go from here?" And two of the persons who addressed students gave similar answers.

Charles Evers, mayor of Fayette, Miss., and a candidate for governor, lay the blame for the killings on the shoulders of the state and federal governments. The only way to prevent the killings from being repeated, he said, was for blacks to "become the system," to take it over by voting themselves and "open-minded" whites into positions of power. He urged the students to register and vote, and to return to their home communities and urged others to do likewise.

Fannie Lou Hamer, the activist from Ruleville, sang a gospel tune, "I know the Lord will find a way," and then admonished the students to "get out and vote for Charles Evers." She got a standing ovation.

Whether their advice will be followed cannot be predicted. Jackson State students face formidable challenges, not the least of which are roadblocks erected by the school's administration. Peoples, like all presidents of state-supported black schools, must walk a tightrope, knowing that the eye of the Mississippi legislature is always on him. This year, for instance, he has had to fend off a plan proposed by Jackson city commissioner Ed Cates, who wants to move the college out of the city and use the vacated land to build a public housing project. If Jackson State were to become a base for black activism, it would almost surely face a funding cut-back.

But despite all the problems, there is an air of hopefulness. Some students say that they will work to make Charles Evers's campaign, and the campaigns of an estimated 500 other blacks running for local office, a monument to Gibbs and Green. And others pointed to a special edition of the student newspaper, which contained a poem with the lines, "Let freedom ring from the red hills of Georgia,/Let freedom ring from the plains of Mississippi. Let freedom ring from the mother land of Africa," as evidence that the campus was moving out of apathy into action.

On May 14, the anniversary, James Green's mother, Phillip Gibbs's widow and three of the students wounded in the clash filed a \$13.8-million suit in federal and state courts against the state and city authorities. If the suit is successful, one student commented, "justice will at least start being done." . . . J.W. FROM THE:

Race Relations
REPORTER

WASHINGTON WIRE: "A Special Weekly Report From The Wall Street Journal's Capital Bureau"---May 14:

"NIXONITES DEEMPHASIZE racial action, feeling there's little political gain now."

"HEW, Justice Department officials begin plotting how to carry out the Supreme Court busing decision; the emphasis will be on conciliating the South. HEW's Richardson delays taking any strong steps to force more integration in state colleges. His civil rights workers had threatened several states, including Louisiana, with loss of federal funds.

"Romney's HUD Department downgrades its integration requirements in handing out aid to localities. Nixon's promised response to demands of Congress' black caucus is behind schedule. New initiatives to spur minority enterprise are unlikely; Stans wants to replace the departing Negro chief with a white man. One black adviser fears white dictation, 'plantation-type politics'".

"Congressional liberals, except for Minnesota Senator Mondale, raise few squawks. Most politicians see only minuses now in aid to Negroes."



When the Wall Street Journal speaks of "conciliating the South", it means the white South. When we talk of Nixon's Southern Strategy, we mean his white Southern Strategy. When nearly everyone mentions Southerners, they're talking about white Southerners. When any of us really mean everybody southern in the south, we say "all Southerners". Perhaps it is time for us to start saying it precisely as it is meant, in order to keep the issue clear.

P. Derian

As in white Citizen's Council?

Right!

How about white KKK?

Exactly!

Is that entirely fair? She may have gone too far.

Anyway, she should have used a lighter touch. Lighter than white???

NOTES FROM THE STATE OFFICE.....

SUNFLOWER COUNTY CAP/DELEGATE AGENCY PROBLEMS; A hearing was held in Atlanta May 18 & 19, no decision has been rendered. The Hearing Examiner, Mr. Julius Nix of St. Louis, Missouri announced that he would make recommendations to OCD Director, Dr. Zeigler. Danny Cupit, MCHR Board member, attended for the Council and felt that the examiner had restricted the issues to such an extent, very little in the way of a full solution could be expected.

It is sad that a national issue (whether the concept of delegate agency-community control will continue as part of the poverty program) must be fought out in a place with such complex problems. The people of Sunflower County are in the position of the bone in a dog fight.

Betty Pearson, MCHR Board member, is the Council liason with Sunflower County organizations, residents and the Field Foundation. Field is giving support to the delegate while the issue is being resolved.

Peggy Liddell. "My solution to some of our problems is to practice what America has been preaching for centuries. That is, love, equality, freedom. Are these really valuable in our society or are they only America's sentiments, preached and rarely practiced?"

Peggy was one of our Millsaps College Sociology Dept. interns this year. Warren Hamby was the other and prepared a fine analysis, with constructive suggestions, of the internship experience. We are grateful for their help.

THANKS TO: Judith Krabbe and Margret Wodetzki, members of the Jackson Council for many hours of volunteer work in the office. Brookie Derian for helping with the Newsletter.

"G.W.M. (1920-1970)" is the title of the poem quoted on the outer wrapper. Written by Edwin Honig, it appeared in the New York Times, May 29, 1971.

The Director's position is still open. Applications and inquiries to: Rev. J.W. Carroll, President, Miss. Council on Human Relations, 424 South Tenth St., Oxford, Miss. 38655.

The office will get some help from a Neighborhood Youth Corps worker for 26 hours a week this summer. We don't know who he or she will be yet but with nearly 2,000 Newsletters to put together, fold staple and address, we feel.....like who ? not the settlers saved by the Cavalry.....who helped the Indians anyway ?

RACE RELATIONS REPORTER, a newsletter published by the Race Relations Information Center, P.O. Box 6156, Nashville, Tenna, 37212, twice a month.

CONFESSIONS OF A WHITE RACIST

by Larry L. King

Reviewed by J. W. Hemingway

Many will hate Larry King for his small book. Some will start to read it but get no farther than the introduction to this Texan's message of less than 200 pages.

Hate doesn't always need an explanation but the explanation here is that Larry King, a southern-born white, admits he was and still is a racist. In so admitting, he will cause every white man in America to sense indictment and accusation. Defensiveness is the first reaction and for many the guilt pressures of this accusation will cause the defensiveness to change into hate the same way indentured servants become life-long slaves.

Larry King covers his childhood days that awkwardly pushed him into the army and once having served his country, he tells of his stumbling attempts, via Washington and Harvard, to mold himself into a writer. He succeeded in that task, for as a candid, witty, sadly honest writer he talks of the racism prevalent in all aspects of his life. It's that natural, masonic, K of C, DAR, Junior League, share cropper, country store, citizens council type of racism every white man in America knows.

Before critics assail King by saying he gives no credit for the advances made in race relations, they should note that the author does point out the advances in state and federal laws. He is talking about the change in peoples' minds and hearts on substantial issues. That change is slow--painfully slow. For millions it will not come. King is not talking

just about a "we" and "they" problem. The problem he talks about is a myth-rumor-ridden old crone of fear, capable of killing us all if we let her live.

Confessions make many people uneasy, but if you are white and doubt King's observations --progress acknowledged-- visit with some old school friends or army buddies or neighbors. You will find, as did King, "just how easy it might be to call up a lynch mob from among my old friends."

Viking (\$5.95)



YAZOO: Integration in a Small Southern Town

by Willie Morris

Reviewed by Jason Berry

Certainly, Willie Morris is one of America's very fine writers. His dual perspective---that of the Southerner returning, and that of the Northerner searching for redefinitions of himself through the return--- is at once intriguing and noteworthy. Yazoo: Integration in a Small Southern Town is written in much the same vein as Morris's first book, North Toward Home.

Continued.....

Both books are primarily auto-biographical and are concerned with the author's dilemma as the Southern-Northerner. Unfortunately, and this is often the case with fine writers who write social documents, one must be careful to keep the style of Yazoo (which is so appealing because it is so much Willie Morris) from the content of the book, purportedly a statement on integration in Mississippi.

Integration, as we all hope it will be one day, is an ideal; it is something which through our hardest moments we have been able to get a glimpse of. The problem with Yazoo is a very serious one: it paints far too optimistic a picture. Integration may well be succeeding in Yazoo City, but it is no means succeeding in the larger sense of the states which have, in one or another, have very strategically managed to retain segregated education. In Port Gibson, Mississippi, which is thirty miles from Charles Evers's Fayette, there is a black high school which has now expanded to include all the whites, even the ones who did not want to go there before. Private schools are certainly not to be considered the rule, but nor can they be deemed the exception. In Jackson, once the higher courts handed down the final decision, the new private schools Jackson Prep was conceived and endowed with \$1 million within a matter of days. True, not all sections of Mississippi are financially able to do this, but the example is as much a microcosmic one as Morris's Yazoo. The truth, plain and simple, is that Mississippi is very far from integration, and it will be one hell of a long time in getting there. The case of Yazoo City is an encouraging one, but as Morris himself says of Southern history, it is one of "anguish."

Perhaps the greatest wrong this book does is that it gives the Eastern liberal cause to sit and tell himself that the South is finally coming around. Yes, we are, but not half as quick or with half of the gusto and savvy as Willie Morris would have us. Many Southerners bemoan the Easter college students who journey down for a month in the summer to "save the South". What, indeed, will we do if our journalists return and then venture back with false impressions to hand out?

I rather think that if Mr. Morris were not a Southerner he could not have written such an assertive statement on Southern integration. But it takes a Southerner to immerse himself in the emotions and yearnings of the past, and to place them into some statement on the future. Unfortunately, Yazoo would have us believe that our first step has gotten us half-way there. Pride is a magnanimous accomplishment is a very important thing, for it sustains and gives strength for the future. But by no means is it something worth vaunting, because it is only a small piece of a very large mosaic.

GRATUITOUS REMARKS WE COULD ALL DO WITHOUT.....

From the Jackson Daily News, Ask Jack Sunn column,

Question: "... They say not enough people have asked for 'good' music. How about the minorities? Nothing to be done for them? J.P.C."

Reply: "If you've noticed, the FCC thinks some minorities are 'more equal' than others, but that's beside the point in this instance."

HURRAY FOR A VETO OF A VETO!!!!

Finally HEW Secretary Elliot Richardson overrode the veto of Governor JBW to withhold funds to the Emergency School Assistance Program. ESAP is a program designated to ease the problems of school desegregation. Since the veto was overridden, there are now fourteen Mississippi community programs that will receive ten per cent of approximately seventy-five million dollars with the other ninety per cent going directly to the school systems.

THE DRUMMER a new bi-monthly, tabloid paper, edited by Steve Wilson has just published its third edition of news for "Mississippi's Black Community". They are seeking distribution managers and ask those interested to contact Elliot Gwinn, circulation director at 355-7495 or 128 $\frac{1}{2}$ Gallatin Street, Jackson.

IT LOOKS AS IF THE BATTLE IS LOST

Several weeks ago, a spokesman from the U.S. Department of Agriculture presented plans for the aerial application of Mirex in the Delta. The Boards of Supervisors approved the USDA plans and it appears that Mirex will be sprayed in order to eradicate the fire ant beginning next month. Here's hoping that the result is not a bad one for other living things.

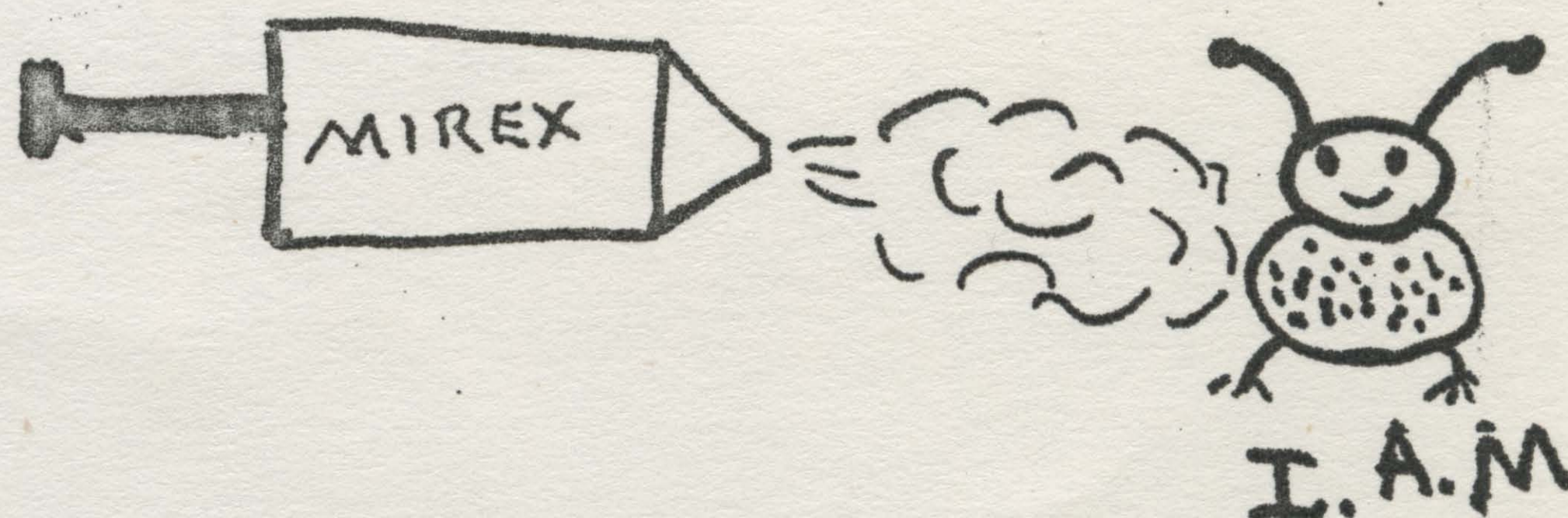
AS WAS EXPECTED.....

The white North Mississippi Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church rejected a merger plan which was adopted by the black Upper Mississippi Conference. The plan recommended that a black be appointed to head one of the newly structured seven geographical districts and that property of both white and

black Methodist churches be combined under one--the North Mississippi Conference. Some of the reasons given for the rejection-- dissolution of the black churches, too little black representation, fear of local church merger, exclusion of any definite plans on a local level, since plans presented were on a district and administrative level. And of course, the best and most sustaining reason as cited by most of the delegates --"the people just aren't ready for it". Ever wonder when the people will be ready? And which people?

AND SPEAKING OF PEOPLE....

When are those people at the Mississippi Highway Patrol going to stop harassing people. Since the Republic of New Africa occurrences, the black citizens in that area have been subjected to an "over-protective" cover to keep outsiders out and - perhaps- insiders in. On the weekend of June 4 and 5, and the previous week road-blocks were erected-along with about twenty other patrol vehicles- for checking driver's licenses in this area. Several Hinds County citizens were verbally abused, arrested and beaten. (a part of one man's beard and moustache were removed with wire pliers.) A lawfully operated cafe was ordered closed, after officers threatened and intimidated the owner and his customers. Later the owner was beaten, arrested, and bodily shoved through a glass door. "How long, o Lord?"



"Only taking handguns out of easy circulation will effectively reduce the incidence of gun crimes. Gun crime statistics reflect a tragic and senseless slaughter that the nation can no longer endure."

Rep. Emanuel Celler
May 29, 1971, The New York Times

"Don't say his death
is your death, is my death.
He died alone."

from a poem by
Edwin Honig

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