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## 4. Mississippi I: McComb

The hundred and fifteen students stopped in front of the city hall to begin praying one by one, Brenda first, and then Curtis, and then Hollis, and then Bobby Talbert and then finally all of us herded up the steps and into the city courthouse, and Bob Zellner, who was the only white participant, attacked on the steps as he went up, and then a mob outside, waiting, milling around, threatening. And inside, they brought the people down, the white people, the so-called good citizens of the town, one by one, to take a look at this Moses guy. And they would come down and stand in front of the jail and say, "Where's Moses? Where's Moses?"

That scene is recalled by Robert Parris Moses, twentynine years old, of medium height and sturdy build, with light brown skin and a few freckles near his nose, who looks at you directly out of large tranquil eyes, who talks slowly, quietly, whose calm as he stands looking down a street in Mississippi is that of a mountain studying the sea. It took place in the fall of 1961, shortly after he arrived in Mississippi and threw state officials into great nervousness with the fantastic suggestion that Negroes should register to vote.

Bob Moses was raised in Harlem, one of three boys in the family. He went to Hamilton College in upstate New York, majoring in philosophy, and then went to Harvard where he did graduate work in philosophy and received a Master's Degree in 1957. He began teaching mathematics at Horace Mann High School in New York. Two years later there occurred the most cataclysmic event of his life, the kind against which perhaps all of the painful scenes he would watch later in the Delta of Mississippi might measure small: his mother, aged forty-three, died of cancer. It was a steep and sudden fall, for she and Bob's father had just had their first real vacation, which he described:

"Did I say vacation, no, our honeymoon. A beautiful bubble that the two of us floated in . . . the world locked outside that thin filament. . . . I would close my eyes and it would seem to me that we two would be singing. . . . But bubbles burst."

Gregory Moses wrote down for his sons what life had been like with their mother. He is a working man, and has been all his life, a remarkable man, grey-haired, handsome, soft of voice, with a keen intelligence and a gift for language which another world, another time, would have put to splendid use. But it was no waste to pour all of himself into the lives of his three sons.

Gregory Moses recalls that Bob, as a baby, took all sorts of incredible risks cavorting on his high chair, "but somehow knew the laws of balance and never fell." Today, after three years on the Mississippi high wire, with all the officialdom of the state tugging at it, Bob Moses still keeps his balance.

It was only a few months after his mother's death that the first sit-ins took place, and Bob Moses read about them in the newspapers. "I knew for sure I would have to come South to take a first-hand look." During the spring break from his teaching job he went to visit his uncle in Hampton, Virginia. "I slipped into the crowd of students picketing and sitting-in at Newport News . . . my first introduction to the movement." Back in New York, talking to Bayard Rustin about the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Moses prepared to go South that summer.

After arriving in Atlanta, Moses stuffed envelopes until he and Jane Stembridge decided that, on his own money (for SNCC had none), he would make a field trip to Mississippi, gathering people to go to the October conference which SNCC

was going to hold in Atlanta. In Cleveland, Mississippi, he met a wise and rock-like Negro man named Amzie Moore, and that started a train of events that would leave Mississippi not quite the same. Moore was head of the NAACP in his town, and he and Moses sat down that summer of 1960 and planned a campaign to begin registering Negroes to vote.

Anywhere else, such a campaign might mean a certain amount of leg-work, persuasion, and organization; in Mississippi it would require a revolution. While 50 percent of the voting-age whites in Mississippi were registered to vote, only 5 percent of the Negroes were registered. Negroes were 43 percent of the population of the state—but held zero percent of the political offices, zero percent of the political power of the state. The median income of Negro families in Mississippi (U.S. Census figures for 1960) was \$1100. White family income was three times as high. Negroes were laborers, sharecroppers, farm laborers, maids, servants of various kinds. More than half of them lived in houses with no running water; for two-thirds of them there was no flush toilet, no bathtub or shower. They lived in tarpaper shacks and rickety wooden boxes sometimes resembling chicken coops. Most whites were also poor, though not so poor; Mississippi was a feudal land barony, in which a small number of whites controlled the political power and the wealth of the state, using a tiny part of this wealth to pay the salaries of thousands of petty local officials who kept the system as it was by force.

Negroes had been sheriffs and judges and state legislators and even lieutenant-governors in those few years of Radical Reconstruction after the Civil War when Negroes, supported by federal troops, voted in Mississippi. They never dominated Mississippi politics, but in those years, linked to the economic power of Republican white Southerners like Governor James L. Alcorn, they had a voice, and their record as public servants was a good one, as historian Vernon Wharton has pointed out in his study, *Reconstruction in Mississippi*. But the reform

spirit that accompanied the Civil War vanished; the political leaders of the nation began to see greater advantage in an alliance with powerful Southern white Democrats than with poor Southern Negroes, and in 1877 the great Compromise was reached between Northern white politicians and Southern white politicians, at the expense of the Negro. It was agreed, among other things, that the Fourteenth Amendment, which wrote into supreme law that no state could discriminate among its citizens, would be considered dead in the Deep South. The national government would leave the Negro helpless in his semi-slavery now, as it had left him in slavery before the Civil War; it would not interfere with the desires of Southern politicians no matter what the Constitution said.\*

By 1890, Mississippi was to take the leadership of the Southern states in enacting a whole series of laws which legalized the system of segregation from the cradle to the grave. Negro voting was squeezed down to nothing. To any who violated the code, the punishment was swift (between 1890 and 1920, about four thousand Negroes were put to death in the South, without benefit of trial, and Mississippi accounted for a good part of these). With the threat of death, mutilation, or imprisonment at worst, economic destitution at best, the Negro was held down. Segregated Mississippi became as closed a society as slave Mississippi had been.

And now, in the summer of 1960, two Negroes, one a Mississippi farmer, the other a New York school teacher, sat in a farmhouse in the Delta and planned a campaign to dismantle, stone by stone, the prison that was Mississippi.

<sup>\*</sup> The Compromise arose partly out of the disputed presidential election of 1876, and arranged for the Republican candidate, Rutherford Hayes, to become President in return for certain concessions to the South. But, more fundamentally, it came out of the general conditions of the post-Civil War era, in which Northern politicians and businessmen needed Southern white support for peaceful national development along the lines they desired. The Compromise of 1877 gave an affirmative answer to the question, as C. Vann Woodward puts it in *Reunion and Reaction*: "... could the South be induced to combine with the Northern conservatives and become a prop instead of a menace to the new capitalist order?"

After his talks with Amzie Moore, Bob Moses returned to Mississippi the following July, 1961, now as a SNCC staff member. An NAACP leader named C. C. Bryant in the city of McComb, in Pike County, read in *Jet* Magazine about Moses' voter registration plans, and wrote to him suggesting McComb as a place to work. Pike County was in Southern Mississippi, just north of the Louisiana border. Moses came to live in McComb, went around town getting Negro ministers and store-keepers to agree to supply room, board, and transportation expenses for ten students to come to McComb to work on voter registration.

In the meantime SNCC was meeting at Highlander Folk School, and deciding to work on voter registration in the Deep South, along with "direct action" projects. Through Harry Belafonte and others, money was being raised to hire SNCC's first field secretaries. And students who had been in the Freedom Rides were coming out of jail. Somehow, they began, little by little, to drift into McComb. Two of SNCC's first field secretaries now came in to help Moses: Reggie Robinson from Baltimore, slim, dark, animatedly cheerful; and John Hardy, of the Nashville student movement. On August 7, 1961, the first voter registration school was opened in Pike County and Negroes, in a slow release of resolve bottled up for a hundred years, began to study the complexities of registering to vote in Mississippi.

Mississippi law requires that a person wanting to vote must fill out a twenty-one—question form. He must interpret any section of the Constitution of Mississippi chosen by the registrar, who has complete authority to decide if the interpretation is correct—there are 285 sections in the Mississippi Constitution. But in the schools people patiently went over the questionnaire and the Constitution, and the first Negroes made the trek to the county courthouse.

Sixteen Negroes went down to the county seat of Magnolia to register, and six passed the test. Word got out to two neighboring counties, Amite and Walthall Counties, and people began to ask for schools in their areas. Three Negroes from Amite County—an old farmer and two middle-aged ladies—decided to go to Liberty, the county seat, to register. Bob Moses went with them.

We left early morning August 15. It was a Tuesday. We arrived at the courthouse about 10 o'clock. The registrar came out. I waited by the side, waiting for either the farmer or one of the two ladies to say something to the registrar. He asked them: What did they want? What were they here for? In a very rough tone of voice. They didn't say anything. They were literally paralyzed with fear. So after a while I spoke up and said they would like to come to try to register to vote. So he asked: Who are you? What do you have to do with them? Do you want to register? I told him who I was and that we were conducting a school in McComb, and these people had attended the school, and they wanted an opportunity to register. Well, he said, they'll have to wait. . . . Our people started to register, one at a time. In the meantime a procession of people began moving in and out of the registration office: the sheriff, a couple of his deputies, people from the far office, the people who do the drivers' licenses-looking in, staring, moving back out, muttering. Finally finished the whole process about 4:30; all three of the people had had a chance to register—at least to fill out the form. This was a victory.

As the four drove back on the road to McComb, a high-way patrolman whom they had seen in the registration office flagged them down. Moses got out of the car to find out what was wrong and was told by the policeman to get back in. He wrote down the name of the patrolman, who then pushed him back, saying, "Get in the car, nigger," and ordered all of them to follow him to McComb. There Moses was placed under arrest on a charge of interfering with an officer, but was given a quick trial and a suspended sentence with a five-dollar fine after they heard him complaining on the telephone to the

Justice Department in Washington. He described the incident later: "Well, I refused to pay . . . since I was obviously not guilty. I was taken to jail then—this was my first introduction to Mississippi jails."

On the farm of an Amite County NAACP leader, Mr. E. W. Steptoe, a school was set up, and on August 29, Bob Moses again accompanied two persons to Liberty. There he was attacked on the street by Billy Jack Caston (cousin of the sheriff and son-in-law of a state representative named E. H. Hurst) who proceeded to hit Moses again and again with the butt end of a knife. "I remember very sharply that I didn't want to go immediately back into McComb because my shirt was very bloody and I figured that if we went back in we would probably frighten everybody." So Moses and the two men with him went back to Mr. Steptoe's farm, before going anywhere else. He washed up, and they made their way to McComb. Later, Moses had his head wound sewn up with eight stitches.

McComb was at this time in a state of excitement. The two arms of SNCC (voter registration and direct action) had begun to move, hardly days after the decision at Highlander. Marion Barry, one of the "direct action" advocates, arrived in McComb on August 18 and began to hold workshops on nonviolent action. Three days before the beating of Moses, two eighteen-year-olds, Curtis Hayes and Hollis Watkins, sat-in at the Woolworth lunch counter in McComb—the first such act of defiance in the area's history. They were arrested on a charge of breaching the peace and sentenced to thirty days in jail. The evening that Moses returned to McComb two hundred Negroes attended a mass meeting, where they heard James Bevel speak, and made plans for further sit-ins and registration attempts. "We felt that it was extremely important that we go back to Liberty immediately so the people wouldn't think we'd been frightened off by the beating."

Now McComb, Mississippi saw another "first": a Negro

—Robert Moses—filed charges of assault and battery against a white—Billy Jack Caston.

Well, it turned out that . . . we did have his trial, that they had a six-man Justice of the Peace jury, that the courthouse in a twinkling was packed. That is, the trial was scheduled that day and within two hours farmers, all white, came in from all parts of the county, bearing their guns, sitting in the courthouse. We were advised not to sit in the courthouse except while we testified—otherwise we were in a back room. After the testimony was over the sheriff came back and told us that he didn't think it was safe for us to remain there while the jury gave its decision. Accordingly he escorted us to the county line. We read in the papers the next day that Billy Jack Caston had been acquitted.

Meanwhile, there were more sit-ins in McComb. A fifteen-year-old Negro girl named Brenda Travis had walked the streets from noon to five every afternoon with the SNCC people, under the hot sun, had become exasperated with the apathy or the fear shown by Negroes in McComb, and decided they needed to be awakened. She and five other high school students sat-in and were arrested. Her companions were sentenced to eight months in jail for "breach of peace." Brenda Travis was turned over to juvenile authorities and sentenced to a year in a state school for delinquents. Her high school principal immediately expelled her from school.

More SNCC workers were arriving in McComb. One of them was Travis Britt, a student from New York City. Not long after his beating, Bob Moses went with Britt and four Negroes eager to register to the county courthouse in Liberty. "It was around the fifth of September," Moses recalls,

and I stood around and watched Travis get pummeled by an old man, tall, reedy, and thin, very very mean with a lot of hatred in him. . . . Travis and I had been sitting out front of

the courthouse and then decided to move around back because people had started to gather around front. Finally about fifteen people gathered around back and began questioning Travis and myself. My own reaction in all those instances is simply to shut up, to be silent. I get very, very depressed. The people were talking to Travis . . . asking him where was he from and how come a nigger from New York City could think that he could come down here and teach people how to register to vote. . . .

## Travis Britt reported the incident as follows:

I reached into my pocket and took out a cigarette. A tall white man . . . wearing a khaki shirt and pants stepped up to me and asked: "Boy, what's your business?"—at which point I knew I was in trouble. The clerk from the hallway came to the back door . . . with a smile on his face and called to the white man. . . . At this point, the white man whom they called Bryant hit me in my right eye. Then I saw this clerk motion his head as if to call the rest of the whites. They came and all circled round me and this fellow Bryant hit me on my jaw, then my chin. Then he slammed me down . . . I stumbled on to the courthouse lawn. The crowd followed, making comments. Bryant . . . just kept hitting and shouting, "Why don't you hit me, nigger?" I was beaten into a semi-conscious state. My vision was blurred. . . . I heard Bob tell me to cover my head.... Bryant released me. Moses then took me by the arm and took me out to the street. . . .

Two days later, John Hardy, twenty-one, from Nashville, where his father worked as a porter and his mother as a maid, was beaten with a pistol by the registrar of Walthall County and then arrested for disturbing the peace. With the aid of SNCC worker MacArthur Cotton (tall, husky, born in Kosciusko, Miss., a student at Tougaloo Southern Christian College) and others, Hardy had been running a voter registration school in Walthall County. Two people who attended the school said

they wanted to go down to Tylertown to register, and Hardy said he would go with them.

The next morning they stopped by for me between 8:30 and 9:00 A.M. Mr. Wilson, Mrs. Peters, MacArthur Cotton and I drove into town together in a pick-up truck . . . parked in the street down by the fish market, and I went in with Mrs. Peters and Mr. Wilson to the Courthouse. . . . I stood just outside the door to the inner office, about four or five feet away from the registrar's desk. The registrar asked what they wanted. Mrs. Peters stated they had come to register to vote. Mr. Wood said he wasn't registering anyone. . . . I stepped into the doorway to the inner office and looked at Mrs. Peters and asked her what the trouble was. . . . Mr. Woods said, "What right do you have coming down here messing in these people's business, and why don't you go back where you came from? . . . " He reached behind a desk . . . and pulled a gun from the drawer . . . and said, "I want you to get the hell out of this office and never come back. . . . I was frightened and turned and started to walk out of the office. . . . I felt a blow on my head. I can only remember being very dazed, and the next thing I knew Mr. Wilson and Mrs. Peters were helping me across the street and up an alleyway. I felt something running down my head and saw blood dripping on the ground...."

Out on the street, Hardy was taken into custody by the sheriff and charged with inciting to riot and resisting arrest. The rest of the day, Hardy was in a prison cell, or being interviewed by the District Attorney and others. It wasn't until 4:30 that afternoon that he was finally taken to a doctor at the Walthall County Hospital who pronounced it a superficial wound, said it required no stitches, and charged Hardy \$3.00. He was held overnight in jail, then released on bond. Later, the Justice Department brought a successful suit to block Hardy's prosecution, on the grounds that it constituted intimidation of voters under the 1957 Civil Rights Act.

"Well, the Travis Britt incident, followed by the John Hardy incident . . . just about cleaned us out," says Bob Moses.

"The farmers in both those counties were no longer willing to go down. The people down in McComb were in an uproar over the sit-in demonstrations and the fact that Brenda Travis, a fifteen-year-old girl, was in jail. And for the rest of the month of September, we just had a tough time. There wasn't much we could do." The youngsters in jail on sit-in charges had \$5000 bail hanging over them, and the chief problem now was to raise that money and get them out of jail, and then somehow figure out what the next set of steps would be. In the midst of this, a man was murdered. As Moses tells it:

The boom lowered on September 25; Herbert Lee, a Negro farmer, was killed in Amite County. I was down at Steptoe's with John Doar from the Justice Department and we asked Steptoe—was there any danger in that area—who was causing the trouble, and who were the people in danger? Steptoe told us that E. H. Hurst, who lived across from him, had been threatening people and that specifically people said that he, Steptoe, Herbert Lee, and George Reese were in danger of losing their lives. We went out, but didn't see Lee that afternoon. That night, John Doar and the other lawyers from the Justice Department left. The following morning about twelve o'clock, Dr. Anderson came by the voter registration office and said a man had been shot in Amite County. They had brought him over to McComb and he was lying on a table in a funeral home in McComb and he asked me if I might have known him. I went down to take a look at the body, and it was Herbert Lee. There was a bullet hole in the left side of his head, just above the ear. He had on his farm clothes.

Moses waited until it was dark, then went out with a few others into Amite County, riding past night-shrouded cotton fields from one Negro home to another until three or four in the morning, trying to find witnesses to the killing of Herbert Lee. They continued this four or five nights, driving through the darkness, fighting off sleep, waking up Negro families in the hours before dawn to try to piece together what happened. They found three Negro farmers who had seen the shooting and who told essentially the same story. They had been standing at the cotton gin early in the morning when Herbert Lee drove up in a truck with a load of cotton. E. H. Hurst was following directly behind in an empty truck. (This truck, incidentally, was owned by Billy Jack Caston.) Hurst got out of the truck and came up to Lee, who was sitting in the cab of his truck, and began arguing with him. Hurst gesticulated, pulled a gun from under his shirt. Lee said he wouldn't talk to Hurst unless he put the gun away, and Hurst put the gun under his coat. Then Lee slid out of the cab on the side away from Hurst. Hurst ran around in front of the cab, took his gun out, pointed it at Lee and fired.

"This was the story that three Negro witnesses told us on three separate nights as we went out, in Amite County, tracking them down, knocking on doors, waking them up in the middle of the night." These witnesses also told another story: that the sheriff, the deputy sheriff, and some white people in town had put pressure on them to say that Lee, who was about five feet four, had tried to hit Hurst, who was about six feet two, with a tire tool.

Only at one point in Bob Moses' detailed, quiet recounting of the killing of Herbert Lee did his voice show emotion:

Lee's body lay on the ground that morning for two hours, uncovered, until they finally got a funeral home in McComb to take it in. No one in Liberty would touch it. They had a coroner's jury that very same afternoon. Hurst was acquitted. He never spent a moment in jail. . . . I remember reading very bitterly in the papers the next morning, a little item on the front page of the McComb *Enterprise Journal* said that a Negro had been shot as he was trying to attack E. H. Hurst. And that was it. Might have thought he'd been a bum. There was no mention that Lee was a farmer, that he had a family, nine kids, beautiful kids, and that he had farmed all his life in Amite County.

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One of the three Negro witnesses to the murder of Herbert Lee was Louis Allen, who shortly after the murder was whisked from the scene by a white man, driven to the coroner's jury hearing, and told what to say to the jury: that Hurst was right in claiming he had killed Lee in self-defense. The coroner's jury accepted Hurst's story. A month after the killing of Lee, a federal grand jury met to consider indicting Hurst. Louis Allen drove to McComb to tell Bob Moses that he had lied at the coroner's jury hearing, that he wanted to tell the truth at the grand jury hearing, but wanted protection.

Moses says: "We called the Justice Department in Washington. We talked to responsible officials in that department. They told us that there was no way possible to provide protection for a witness at such a hearing and that probably in any case it didn't matter what he testified—that Hurst would be found innocent." Allen gave the grand jury the same story he had told the coroner's jury, and Hurst was exonerated, the grand jury deciding there was insufficient evidence to indict. About six months later a deputy sheriff told Allen he knew he had told the F.B.I. that his story about the killing was a lie. The deputy hit Allen with a flashlight and broke his jaw. Moses says: "It's for reasons like these that we believe the local F.B.I. are sometimes in collusion with the local sheriffs and chiefs of police, and that Negro witnesses aren't safe in telling inside information to local agents of the F.B.I."

That was not the end of the affair. On a Friday night, January 31, 1964, Louis Allen was found dead in his front yard. Three shotgun blasts had killed him.

The force of SNCC revolutionaries in McComb grew. Chuck McDew, with his powerful frame and ever-present look of deep thoughtfulness, came into town. So did Bob Zellner, a college student from Alabama, SNCC's first white field man, whose job was to work among white college students in the South, but who couldn't stay away from the Negro community. About ten days after the slaying of Herbert Lee, 115 high

school students in McComb marched through town to express their feelings about the expulsion of their classmate Brenda Travis and the killing of Herbert Lee.

Bob Moses and the other SNCC people went with them, through the Negro neighborhoods, into downtown McComb, where they stopped and began to pray on the steps of City Hall. White men in shirt sleeves stood by and watched. The street was thick with cars circling the block continuously. The police asked them to leave, but they refused, and were arrested one by one. Marching up the steps to be booked, Bob Zellner was attacked by a white man. Moses and McDew were hit also, then dragged into the station by police. Moses, McDew, Zellner, and six other SNCC people, charged with "contributing to the delinquency of minors," Moses recalls, were brought downstairs into a large room to be questioned.

I was again very quiet all the way down. . . . I remember when I went in, the room was very tense; all of the people were sort of sitting around on the edges, on benches, in the dark, and the sheriff was standing, and at one point threatened me about saying "Yassuh" and "Nossir," and I remember that I finally just answered the questions without saying "yes" or "no."

The prisoners slept on a concrete bunker and on the floor before being assigned to cells. In jail, their spirit was high. They sang. McDew and Moses made a chessboard on the floor, shaping chess pieces out of cigarette butts. They swapped stories and told jokes until they were let out on bond a few days later.

Over a hundred high school students in McComb, in response to their principal's demand that they pledge not to participate in demonstrations, stayed out of school. The principal gave them an ultimatum: return to school by 3:00 P.M. on October 16 or be expelled. At a quarter of three on that day, 103 students returned to school, turned in their books, and

walked out. "Nonviolent High" opened up in Pike County to take care of their education, with Moses teaching algebra and geometry, Dion Diamond teaching physics and chemistry, and McDew teaching history, until several weeks later Campbell Junior College in Jackson agreed to take the students. It was just in time, for in late October the SNCC staff in Pike County was found guilty of the charges connected with the march in McComb, and spent the next few months in jail, unable to raise the \$14,000 required to keep them free pending appeal. In November, Bob Moses managed to slip a message from his jail to a local Negro who got it to SNCC headquarters in Atlanta:

We are smuggling this note from the drunk tank of the county jail in Magnolia, Mississippi. Twelve of us are here, sprawled out along the concrete bunker; Curtis Hayes, Hollis Watkins, Ike Lewis and Robert Talbert, four veterans of the bunker, are sitting up talking—mostly about girls; Charles McDew ("Tell the story") is curled into the concrete and the wall; Harold Robinson, Stephen Ashley, James Wells, Lee Chester Vick, Leotus Eubanks, and Ivory Diggs lay cramped on the cold bunker; I'm sitting with smuggled pen and paper, thinking a little, writing a little; Myrtis Bennett and Janie Campbell are across the way wedded to a different icy cubicle.

Later on, Hollis will lead out with a clear tenor into a freedom song, Talbert and Lewis will supply jokes, and McDew will discourse on the history of the black man and the Jew. McDew—a black by birth, a Jew by choice, and a revolutionary by necessity—has taken on the deep hates and deep loves which America and the world reserve for those who dare to stand in a strong sun and cast a sharp shadow. . . .

This is Mississippi, the middle of the iceberg. Hollis is leading off with his tenor, "Michael row the boat ashore, Alleluia; Christian brothers don't be slow, Alleluia; Mississippi's next to go, Alleluia." This is a tremor in the middle of the iceberg —from a stone that the builders rejected.

Mississippi I

Out of jail finally in December, Moses and the others pondered their next moves. They had learned something in the flurry of events centered in McComb that summer and fall of 1961. Direct action ran head-on into the stone wall of absolute police power in Mississippi. After the beatings of Moses and Britt and Hardy, and the killing of Herbert Lee, there had been continuing violence in the city of McComb: in October, two young white men, Paul Potter of the National Student Association and Tom Hayden of Students for a Democratic Society, were dragged from their car and beaten in the street; in November, four CORE people were brutally beaten by a mob of whites when they tried to eat at the lunch counter of the Greyhound bus terminal (this was a week after the Interstate Commerce Commission ruling went into effect, but FBI men merely stood by taking notes as the beating took place); also that month, someone fired a shotgun into the bedroom of Dion Diamond and John Hardy; in December, four white men attacked three newspapermen in the street, and three more CORE people were attacked at the Greyhound bus terminal.

Voter registration was presumably a milder form of activity than a sit-in or a march downtown or a Freedom Ride, but here the SNCC people found more frustration. In all of Amite County, there was one Negro officially registered. But, as McDew said wryly: "We haven't been able to find him." Negro ministers, Negro businessmen, those people in the black community who had the most resources, were also most vulnerable to economic pressure from the white community, and they could not be counted on to give anything but undercover help. It became clear that the only way to carry on voter registration campaigns was, as Moses put it, "to build a group of young people who would not be responsible economically to any sector of the white community and who would be able to act as free agents."

With youngsters from the towns and countryside of Mis-

sissippi clustering now in growing numbers around the handful of SNCC staff people, and with perhaps one courageous businessman, one minister or farmer in the Negro community willing to take risks, they might move. McComb, with all its bitter legacy, was a beginning for SNCC in Mississippi. "We had, to put it mildly, got our feet wet," Moses said. They now moved north, deeper into the Delta.