

TO: National Action Council of CORE  
FROM: Southern Regional Office of CORE  
RE: Unsolved Lynchings

Introduction

During just the past two years, there have been numerous "unsolved" murders in the south of Negroes and whites who were involved in civil rights activities and of Negroes who were not. All the evidence we have, indicates that these murders were committed by segregationists from various communities in the south. Enclosed you will find the list of twenty-two such murders.

The memory of these murders seems to be very short lived in the conscience of Americans throughout the country. But, we must realize that these murders are becoming greater in number as the civil rights movement picks up. During the past year and a half CORE, has lost two staff members and two CORE members by violent death. No one involved in these murders has been brought to justice.

The civil rights movement has not made any significant effort to put pressure upon the federal government to have those who committed the crimes brought to justice. We feel it is time that we do so. The news media have been very reluctant to cover stories of violent deaths of Negroes who were not directly involved in civil rights activities. The deaths of those who were involved in civil rights activities were short lived in the press. Also they seem to have been short lived in the conscience of the American people. The most well known deaths of civil rights workers are the Schwerner, Goodman, Chaney and the Medger Evers case. Yet, public sentiment has not been channeled into proper perspective, so that it can become sufficient pressure to have the federal government prosecute.

One of our major problems in this area seems to be the jury system. The federal government has made a number of arrests in connection with many of the killings, especially those involving civil rights workers. But at the trials of those who are accused of committing the crime they are usually found innocent or are freed by a hung jury. In my opinion this injustice will continue to happen as long as the trials must be held in the community where the crime was committed and the jury selected from the people of that community. In the south, murder of the civil rights workers is usually condoned by the white community, and if it is not condoned by all, most others are afraid to speak out against it. This has been proved in a number of recent cases, namely the Beckwith case in Jackson, Mississippi; the Penn case in Athens, Georgia; and in the recent case in Meadville, Mississippi, in which two men were freed by a justice of peace in connection with the killing of the two young Negroes (their bodies were found in the Mississippi river during the search for the bodies of Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney). The jury system is based on English common law which guarantees a man the right to be tried by a jury of his peers. It is questionable how just that system can be today in the cases where the peers are strongly partisan. There have to be some alternatives established in the immediate future if justice is to be expected in the south in this century.

I suggest that the national office get someone, preferably an attorney, to do research on legislation and other possible solutions to the present problem. This person should talk with some congressman and other attorneys to try to come to some type of workable solution. We will have our research person in the southern office begin to prepare details on as many of the killings as possible. I suggest that Marvin Rich begin immediately to find someone who would do a complete exposé on murders which have occurred during the past two years. As

this information is compiled, it should be distributed as quickly as possible to CORE chapters and other groups so that it can reach the public as widely as possible. Mr. James Farmer should, in as many statements as possible, talk about the murders and the lack of prosecution. After the legal research person has come up with a workable program, we should immediately begin a massive program to have it adopted.