"Story of Greenwood, Mississippi"
Produced for SNCC by Guy Carawan
Folkway Records. N.Y. 1963

Side One

Willie Peacock:                                "This Little Light
 (And Crowd)                                    of Mine"

Bob Moses: My name is Bob Moses and I first came to Mississippi
in the summer of 1960 and I began working with the
voter registration projects in Mississippi in the
summer of 1961. We carried out projects in the
southwest corner of Mississippi that year, and the
next summer we had moved up to the Delta area where
there was a higher concentration of Negroes and we
began projects in six or more Delta towns, including
Greenwood, Mississippi.

Unidentified: Now father, oh Lordee. Now, now, now Lordee. Oh
Lordee. When they get through drinking chairs for
water, when we get on through eating at unwelcome
tables, when we get through shaking unwelcome hands.
We should learn how to meet death somewhere. Don't
let us be afraid to die. Rob me, rob me, Lordee. Rob
me until I won't have no peers....

Dave Sanders: I am a citizen of Greenwood for about fifty years. I
live in and around this town when it was in a
mudhole. I have five children, three sons and two
daughters. I did some honest to God, hard long life
work. Setting rings in the streets and building
manholes and laying curbs which will be here years
and years after I am gone. We know that the
procedures that are being taken now to qualify our
people to register and vote is not pleasing to our
white neighbors.

But the law has been passed that we have rights
to go to the courthouse and apply for registration.
And we are going without any weapon at all, We are
going humble, we are going meek. we are going with
the spirit to treat both sides right. And since that
is our attitude and aim I don't think the white
people of the city ought to feel like we are trying
to get in the front of them. We are asking them
kindly, let us walk by your side.

Mrs. Hamer: Why do they hate us so bad? And we have been working
for them all of our lives. They are the ones riding
in the fine cars when our children have gone to
school barefoot and never getting a meal, and we are
not able to pay for one. Why do they try to just keep
us down? We are not willing to stay down now. And we
are willing to fight.

Cleveland Jordan: This is Cleveland Jordan. I have been in Leflore
County about forty years. When I came here most of
this table land was in woods. I worked by the day for
60 cents a day on up from there to $1.25. Saw with a
cross cut saw cutting logs, dragging them up with
mules, working nights, raising the children— only
saw them live on a Sunday morning. In the bed when I
left in the morning, come in late in the evening, in
the bed. All this six bits a day.

Made table land, farmed one place thirty years,
made all the way from 35 to 40 bales of cotton, and
picked everyone of them. Didn't get too much out of
it. Been registered voter about twenty years. And I
think that I have thre right to help my peoples to
register and vote. I know that God choose my color, I
am not the cause I am black. God choose this color
and he made all nations. And we are brothers, I don't
care how you treat that we are brothers, but we are
just different colors but we are all human. We are
not monkeys, we are human, we have feeling just like
you got.

And I think it is time for our white brothers to
realize that. And so we are just tired of it and we
want to be free. We made all the white people in this
Delta rich. If you ain't got no money than you have
had it, and you ought to have it. And so we just mean
to register and vote, we don't mean to fight and we
don't mean to run. We just mean to go to the poll and
get our freedom. I has fifteen grandchildren and I
know I am not going to live long at the age of sixty.
But I am fighting for my grandchildren so they won't
have to go through what I am going through. I thank
you.

Singing:
(Unidentified)

Bob Moses: The Greenwood voter registration project which
erupted into national prominence fits best into three
stages. The first stage lasted for six months and
started in August of 1962 when Samuel Block went into
Greenwood as a field secretary. He was joined later
on that month by Willie Peacock from Charleston,
Mississippi after he had been chased out by a mob at
the voting office in Greenwood.

What did they do for those six months. Well, for
six months primarily they conducted a very intensive,
very nerve-racking voter registration campaign in which they contacted the Negroes in the community, and really at that time the Negroes in the community were not with them. That is most of the Negroes were aware that they were in town, were aware that the white power structure did not want them in town, and were aware that for the time being they were not going to associate with Sam.

He couldn't find a place to live. They couldn't find a place to meet. And for six months they operated pretty much on the streets, knocking from door to door, contacting people, getting over the fear which is basic in all of these towns that they were going to leave them. That is most of the people felt that Sam and Willie were coming into to work for a little while, to stir up some trouble, to agitate, and then be gone. And what they had to convince the people of, was that they were there to stay. This is what they did from August of 1962 until December 1962.

Willie Peacock: I am Willie Peacock for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Commitee. I am presently working in Greenwood, Mississippi in voter registration. The police began trailing us every night, Sam and I, there is not a night pass that they won't trail us, even now. They don't like this Samuel Block in Greenwood. They are convinced now that Sam is going to stay in Greenwood and that we are going to stay in Greenwood, just like we has said, until we get a satisfactory number of Negroes registered to vote.

You can't very well call me an outsider because I am a Mississippian, was born in Tallahatchie county which is just across the river. This is what my environment has shaped me to be and I think that I am trying to fill a need which has been needed for some time. There is a great amount of fear there. The Negro will tell you a lie, some of them, like they don't want to become registered. They will hide the pride which says if I say, "I am afraid, then I am less than a man." "If I say I don't want to, I am lying but this person doesn't know the difference." So we have been working on cutting through this fear, trying to find that something that really would stimulate the people to get out and do something toward becoming a full-fledged citizen.

I think if we can get the cooperation of the ministers to let us have their churches, to set up schools in to teach reading and writing and citizenship as a whole, I think we will be able to really get the job done in Leflore county.
Willie Peacock:  
(Singing) "That is why we go hungry, sometimes don't sleep or eat, but I keep on fighting for freedom, in the end we will be free. Get on board, children, children; get on board children, children; get on board children, children; let's fight for human rights. I hear those mobs a howling and coming round the square, and catch those freedom fighters, but we are going to meet them there. Get on board, children, children; get on board children, children; get on board children, children; let's fight for human rights. Oh get on board children, children; get on board children, children, get on board children, children; let's fight for human rights."

Bob Moses:  
The coming of the new year brought a coming of a new plateau in the voter registration project in Greenwood. A food and clothing was organized around the country and shipped into Greenwood and thousands of people turned out from the plantations and in town, to stand in line, to wait in the cold to get a box of food, to take it home to a family of eight, ten children who are literally starving.

Now you should understand that Leflore county did not have a bad cotton crop that year. In the first place they had a bumper crop, they turned in more cotton and made more money than they had the year before. But it was a dry season, the cotton was low off the ground, and they were able to use the machines to go in and pick the cotton, which meant that the Negroes didn't share in this wealth or shared less than they usually do.

So that they had a lot of Negro families who were destitute, who were just rock bottom poor. Poverty which you can't imagine in most parts of the United States, poverty in which the children really didn't have food. Which little babies didn't have milk, which the mothers were not able to send their kids to school because they didn't have shoes and they didn't have winter clothes.

Unidentified:  
We don't have enough money to buy clothes or food for our childrens to go to school. Or to take care of school expenses for them and teachers is always asking for money for the childrens. Well some problems, we don't get enough out of our jobs to cover our expenses at home. And some of us just only makes $2.50 a day. And our husbands they doesn't have jobs, they be at home all winter long. And our light bill and gas bills is all the way from $20 to $21 a month.

Some of us, our lights and gas be cut off and it be so cold in the winter time and we have had some
nearby like to froze here this winter. And I know that the women who didn't have husbands, had a house full of children. And the children didn't have jobs, and ther mother were sick and it was just quite a problem to live.

Bob Moses:
It was in this situation you had a chance to tell thousands of people first that they were poor, second why they were poor, and third what some of the things they had to do in order to alleviate their poverty. This meant that you had a chance to tell thousands of people that they needed to walk down to the courthouse and register and vote. For the first time you had hundreds of people lined up at the courthouse in Greenwood, which remember is the home of the Citizens Council, in the heart of the Delta of Mississippi asking to be registered to vote even though they couldn't read and write.

And this is very crucial, because for one thing the Negro has a great fear of being ashamed when he goes down to the courthouse and they ask him questions and he doesn't know the answer. And even a greater fear of being asked to write something, or read something, when he can't read and write. But the poverty was so ripe that they overcame this fear.

Alice Blackman:
I want to vote and I want to be able to say who I want to be in office, and what I feel about it. And if one is in office that beats niggers over the head and cuss them and kick them about in their stores, I want to put them out. We know that all persons born and naturalized in the state of Mississippi are citizens. And we don't have our right of citizenship, we never have had it. We are underprivledged and we are denied of civil rights, and that is what we want. We want freedom of speech, we want freedom of press, we want everything that the white man has. We are entitled to it because we are full- fledged citizens just like they are. And we are willing to die for it. We are willing to die that our children and our children's children may live.

Bob Moses:
If you can imagine it, people were standing in line in front of the church waiting for food while their plantation owner was riding by in the streets, calling out their names and telling them to leave and go back to the plantations. And they were telling him that they were going to stand there and get their food because their children were hungry.

Mrs. Hamer:
I went down to Indianola on the thirty-first of August in 1962, and after I had gone to Indianola we
were stopped by the highway patrol and the city police from Indianola, Mississippi. And on that same date I was fired. The man that I had been working for he said that I would have to go down and withdraw or I would have to leave. So I told him that I was trying to register for myself. And he said if I didn't go down and withdraw (her name from the voter registration rolls) I would have to go and if I did go down and withdraw I still might have to go.

So I didn't have no other choice I went that Friday and spent the night with Mrs. Mary Tucker in Ruleville. So people knowing that I was at her house, they shot in their sixteen times. And I have to move then to Tallahatchie and I lived there up until December, and I am back in Ruleville and I be harassed. I have quite a few things to go through, but it is nothing that will keep me and get my spirit down because now I am in the fight for freedom.

I am just really tired of what I have been going through. We just have to stand up as Negroes now for ourselves and for our freedom. And if it don't do me any good, I do know the young people it will do good. And it is a help to our nation because we need peace and there is no other way that we can have it than trying to live together. And we have been apart but something has got to bring peace to this earth.

Willie Peacock:  "This Little Light of Mine."
(With Crowd)

Bob Moses: The second stage led rapidly into the third stage. The large number of Negroes congregating at the county courthouse frightened the white people and they turned to violence. On February 28, Jimmy Travis, myself, and Randolph Blackwell drove to Greenwood to get a look at the project first hand and see how it was going. That evening as we were leaving, Jimmy spotted a car with three white men in and said that they had been circling around the office that day.

They had parked down the street a little ways. We pulled up behind them. It was dark and we had our lights shining at them. They were three white men in a white Buick. We looked at them, they turned around, looked at us. We drove on to the office and got out and told Sam and Willie that they had better close up that there were suspicious men around. We then drove on out to a grill to gas up before going on out to the highway.

Took a backroad out to the highway and when we
got there the men were sitting across from the highway facing us. They drove slowly by us and didn't see us until they got parallel, and then as we were passing they spotted us, backed up, turned around, and followed us out of town. This time they had on dark glasses and it was the same car. They followed us for seven miles out of town and then finally opened up.

In a spray of bullets like a machine gun, glass was splattering everywhere. Jimmy shouted that he was hit, slumped down into my lap in the front seat and we went off the road. I grabbed at the wheel and stepped on the brakes as Randolph was hollering, "Hit the brakes. Hit the brakes." Finally, we brought the car to a stop. Glass was everywhere, all over the seat. The windows were all blown out. Jimmy was slumped in my lap and Randolph came around and took the car. We drown on to MVC campus, Mississippi Vocational College which was about a few hundred yards up the road. From there we went to the hospital in town and the doctor examined Jimmy and said that he had a bullet in the back of his neck lodged close to his spine.

We waited at that hospital all night and in the morning he was removed to Jackson where they operated. The doctor said that he removed a large copper-jacketed bullet, and that the bullet had lodged close to Jimmy's spine and if it had a little more force when it entered, he would have been killed instantly since it was headed for a vital brain area.

That began the third phase of the voter registration project in Greenwood. We gathered our people from the various towns around the Delta where they were working and moved into Greenwood to see if we couldn't have a crash program to try and get as many Negroes as we could to go down to register to vote. Seemed to be the only way to answer this kind of violence was instead of letting up, to pour it on; instead of backing out, to move more people in; instead of giving any signs of fear, to show them that for once the Negro is not going to turn around, and it was not possible to shoo him out. And that if anything was going to happen at all, there was going to be increased activity.

Side Two

Rev. Barber: We want more faith that we may be able to ask you for what we need her in this torn world. Oh Lordee, don't leave us here in this distress which we are now going through, because we know that you have all power in heaven and in earth. Oh the lily of the valley, the
bright and morning star, fairest of ten thousand to my soul. For heaven's sake our carries and for ... I can't hold my peace. Oh, my father, you said that you would come to our rescue if we would only call that faith. We want more faith my God, we want to close and walk with you, and call that heavenly friend. A light to shine on our road to lead us on to thee.

Hollis Watkins: First, I would just like to like ask everybody in the audience that has been down and attempted to register to raise your hand.

Voice in Crowd: Don't fool us now (laughter).

Watkins: See, there are a number of hands. How do you feel, those that have gone down and registered to vote? Do you feel that you are doing something that you should and feel that you are part of this fight?

Crowd: Yes!

Watkins: All right. I see there are more of us sitting out in the audience that didn't raise their hand. So see we still have a lot of work to do. We should try to do something about this. We are all in this struggle. We are fighting for you too, regardless of whether you are interested in yourself or not, you should take a part in this. Join hands with us, walk down to the courthouse and let the people know that you want to become first class citizens, and you are tired of being second class citizens.

Voice in Crowd: Yes sir!

Watkins: But my friends I want to tell you tonight as long as you stay second class citizens you will never get the things that you should have. You will never get the things that are due to you. We are interested in you. Please don't let us down. There are many in Greenwood's jail fighting for you and me in Mississippi. You see I am from Mississippi too, that is why I am here fighting. People have tried to get me to go up north but I plan to stay here and make Mississippi a better place to live (applause).

And as long as we continue to go up north and run away from the situation we will never make it any better (applause). Tomorrow morning we will like for all of those that didn't raise their hands to meet us at our office about 8:30 in the morning so we all can walk down to the courthouse and become first class citizens. Thank you (applause).
Singing: "Walk With Me."

Bob Moses: We worked all of March, and as was to be expected there was more violence. Sam Block and Willie Peacock were shot at in front of the office one night as they were parked, having come back from the church where they were getting together a clothes shipment. White men drove up close by the car, took a shotgun and blasted through the windows, so close that the pellets didn't have a chance to spread out and luckily none of the four people in the car were injured.

About a week later a group of white men shot into a group of Negroes coming out of a Negro theatre. And then finally late in March one of our workers, George Greene, was shot at just as he entered his house having returned home late at night from work in the office. That next morning we gathered on the church steps of Wesley Methodist Church in Greenwood and started singing.

Willie Peacock: (Singing) Get on board, children, children; get on board children, children; get on board children, children; let's fight for human rights. We know as freedom fighters that we may go to jail, but when you fight for freedom the Lord will call your bail. Get on board children, children; get on board children, children; get on board children, children; let's fight for human rights.

Bob Moses: And we sang and we sang and people gathered around and finally we sang, "We Shall Overcome," in a big circle and I talked to them and explained to them why I thought we needed to walk downtown to do two things— to protest to city hall about the shootings because any time unlicensed cars drive around the town and subsequently shoot at Negroes with white people in the car, the police have to be implicitly involved. It doesn't seem to me possible that unlicensed cars with white men in them can drive around the Negro community and cause violence and the police don't know about them.

So we were going to protest to the police at city hall and then go on to the courthouse to register another type of protest and try and register to vote. We never got to the courthouse. We were met at the police station with police dogs. They told us to turn around or the dog turned loose on them.

Cleveland Jordan: I never thought that Greenwood peoples would treat Negroes, that have been around here, that nursed their children, cooked for them, and farmed this
land. That they would have those type of police that they would put dogs on humans. I was knocked off my feet the other day, I saw a terrible thing happen. I saw them put a dog on a first class citizen, decent man, and told him he was "a black son of a bitch...." I never will overcome it, a "black son of a bitch." A man is not a "son of a bitch," a man is a created being made in God's image. And when God made man he said that he was good.

And I don't think no man ought to be on the police force unless he knows that. I don't think he ought to be among mens. We are going up there without a pocket knife, men coming out there with guns and everything, with guns like that. I think that men that are on the police force ought to be the best men. They ought to know God and they ought to be able to love humanity. No man is fit to be nothing, no police nothing, if he does not have the grace of God in him. Galatians 6 it read like, "Be not deceived, what's ever a man's soul, he is going to reap it." Elijah told Ahab the same dog that licked Nabob's blood will lick yours. The same man that sick the dog on (Rev.) Tucker is going to get dog bit. God don't sick the dogs on him.

Bob Moses:

We left city hall and started towards the courthouse. We walked about two blocks and the police met us again. And some police carrying guns, some on motorcycles, some in their cars. Finally Jim Forman and Lawrence Guyot were arrested and we turned back to walk to the church. When we got to the church the police who had followed us all the way back then began to arrest the voting workers as they were trying to get the people into cars, to carry them by car to the courthouse.

Myself and eight others were arrested, put in the city jail, and later transferred to the county where we stayed for a week. While we were in jail we heard that the people were marching and trying to get down to the courthouse, that Dick Gregory had come to town, and that there was a great deal of uproar about the situation in Greenwood.

Dick Gregory:

I can't tell you how heart broken I was last week as I sat in New York City and read the reports that was coming out of Greenwood. Reports that you would expect to come out of South Africa, reports that you would expect to come out of Russia, South Viet Nam (applause). I read reports and listened to the news on television and I read some things that had happened in any other place in the world America probably would have been at war.

And I couldn't help but think-- we went into Germany, we went into Japan, we went into Korea, we are
keeping a close eye on Cuba— if Russia aggrevated West Berlin half as much as you was aggrevated last week, we would be there. And I can't help but wonder why someone can't come down here. Whether they want to admit it or not, Mississippi is America (applause). When I picked up your local paper today and read where your Governor, who holds the highest office in this state, said the things that he said on the front page of your newspaper, it is disgraceful (applause).

We have been lied on for so long, it has made us over-sensitive, it has made us over-apologetic, it has made us over-defensive. We have been accused of depreciating property by a man who has depreciated our souls. We have been accused of being inferior to this man, I say if he really believed we is really inferior to him he would integrate his schools tomorrow and we would flunk out by noon (laughter). By his crooked tactics and his crooked standards he has made us better than him because he has said if you have 14/15ths white blood and 1/15 Negro blood you are Negro. So who is inferior and superior to who?

Here is a man that claims he wanted racial prejudice and racial segregation and didn't even know how it worked. Because had he been sincere in racial prejudice and racial segregation, I have no business being this light (applause). Because if he really means what he says about racial mixing than I am supposed to be pitch black, midnight black (applause). Here is a man that didn't have enough intelligence to know that if you want to segregate someone and really keep them down you put them up front. He made the great mistake of putting us in the back (applause). So for three hundred years we have been watching him (laughter).

We have been accused of having the highest crime rate in America. And it is so amusing when you turn on television and see the gangster stories, detective plays, you never see us (applause). This man has accused us of having the number one crime rate in America. And I wonder if you ever stopped and asked yourself have we, we haven't put forty sticks of dynamite in Momma's luggage and blew one of those airplanes out of the sky (applause). And you know I don't care what they say about us we ain't never lynched nobody now (applause)!

All the Negro has ever asked for is to be fair. Keep me a second class citizen if you must, but please baby don't make me pay first class taxes (applause). Send me to the worst schools in Mississippi if you must, but please baby when I go to take my voter test, don't give me the same test that you give that white boy (applause). Give me the dirtiest, stinkiest job in the field if you must, but please don't go out and tell
people I stink (applause). We will march through your
dogs (applause) and if you get some elephants we will
march through them (applause). And bring on your tigers
and we will march through them (applause). And we will
keep marching, and marching, and marching until one day
you will look around and we will all be marching
together (applause).

Again I would like to say that it is my pleasure
being here. I can't tell you how much I love you and
how much I respect you, just keep it up. I will be with
you tomorrow morning when we go to the courthouse
(applause). And I will be with you whenever you need
me, just holler I will be there (applause).

Medgar Evers: Thank you very much Mr. (Chuck) McDew. Ladies and
gentlemen it is very good to see the number of persons
out here tonight that there are, and certainly this
indicates that we are ready for freedom and we are
ready to march for it. I just want to say to you here
tonight that the reason I am up here is because you
have given us inspiration in Jackson and we are going
to go back to Jackson, south Mississippi, and all over
Mississippi and fight for freedom as you are fighting
for it here in Greenwood. All we want you to do is keep
going with this fight for freedom. And as we stick
together here, as you feel the pains of dogs here in
Greenwood we will feel them in Jackson. And if we feel
them in Jackson, you feel them here. And when we get
this unity ladies and gentlemen nothing can stop us. We
are going to win this fight for freedom. Thank you very
much (applause).

Bob Moses: For us the events in Greenwood represented a major
breakthrough. For the first time we had hundreds of
people lined up at the courthouse in an effort to
register to vote. We had gotten people off the
plantations where they had been strapped in the
toughest way to economic poverty and the mores of
segregation; and gotten them to come in and face the
white man.

Unidentified: It is something that hasn't ever happened here to us.
We really feels like we have someone thinking of us,
feeling our care. And we are willing to cooperate with
them. We have had the mayor of this town to tell us so
many different things until we just didn't hardly know
which way to go. We were just all tied up, we didn't
know one time whether to let any of them in the door,
But after we come lurching out ourselves, trying to see
what it was that gives us ideas about this. We just
feels all right. We don't feel afraid, not many of us
feeling afraid, not like we have been. We feel like it
was something to help us to live.

Unidentified: (Singing) Ain't no danger in the water, ain't no danger in the water, ain't no danger in the water, get on board, get on board.

Mrs. Hamer: Since I went down to register there has been bloodhounds in front of my door. We are being harassed and brother I work at home or wash, the bills go higher and higher. Everything to put me out of Ruleville is being done. But I will be right there fighting for freedom until God say enough done.

Willie Peacock: (Singing "Hold On.") Hold on, hold on, keep your eyes on the pie, hold on, why don't you hold on. Samuel Block was locked in jail, had no money for his jail, keep your eyes on the pie, hold on, why don't you hold on. Oh Lord, oh Lord, keep your eyes on the pie, hold on, why don't you hold on. Well Barnett, Barnett, don't you know, Mississippi is the next to go. Keep your eyes on the pie, hold on, why don't you hold on. Oh Lord, oh Lord, keep your eyes on the pie, oh Lord, why don't you hold on. Keep your eyes on the pie, oh Lord, why don't you hold on. Oh Lord, oh Lord, keep your eyes on the pie.