# Chapter 31 Self Preservation

In neighboring Louisiana, an armed, tough-minded group of black men came together in the mid 1960s to defend members of their race from white terrorism. They soon moved into Mississippi and by the summer of 1966, the Deacons for Defense and Justice grew to twenty-one chapters, with several hundred members eventually concentrated in both states, including the Delta communities of Yazoo City, Clarksdale and Belzoni.[i]

Fewer than 200 voter registration volunteers had come into Mississippi during the summer of 1965. The MFDP had planned to mount an extensive voter registration drive but this effort was sidetracked when Governor Paul Johnson, in a mid-June special legislative session, called for repeal of the state's discriminatory voting laws. Johnson was paving the way for a court test once the new voting rights bill became law.

But as the Deacons grew, they guarded civil rights marches and aggressively patrolled black communities to ward off night riders. They were involved in shoot-outs with Klansmen and were known to go up against local police in armed confrontations. The group began as a self-defense guard, making up for the lack of police protection, but was soon politicized with clear alternatives to earlier pacifist strategies supported by national civil rights organizations (but not always followed).

Deacons were not the first blacks to advocate the use of guns for self-defense; many African Americans over the years guarded themselves, their families, and communities against assaults through gun ownership. Even Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was reported to have requested gun permits for bodyguards and to have kept an "arsenal of weapons" in his Montgomery home, while publicly opposing any open, organized, self-defense activity.[ii]

In Mississippi, Deacons provided Rev. King with armed security in Jackson and McComb, and during the James Meredith March in the summer of 1966.[iii] Their intervention came after Meredith was shot June 6 near Hernando, a day before the primary election, while walking from Memphis to Jackson to encourage black people to register and vote.[iv]

Meredith undertook his *March Against Fear* to challenge white supremacy and inspire black Mississippians to vote.

"With this announcement, Meredith came back into the news. A few years back, he had been a household name, as well known as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., because of his successful fight in 1962 to become the first black student to attend all-white Ole Miss. Surrounded by federal marshals, Meredith attended the institution and graduated the next year. By enduring harassment and death threats, he became a national hero to the Civil Rights Movement," Jerry Mitchell wrote for Jackson's *Clarion-Ledger*.[v]

Meredith was returning from his first year at Columbia Law School, and the 32-year-old waved to the crowd as he walked along with his ebony and ivory walking stick that he received as a gift in Africa. It was his second time back to Mississippi since his graduation from Ole Miss, the first being a year before when he attended his father's funeral.

As evening fell, Meredith neared a patch of woods outside Hernando, where a man stood "with a gun and a smile…. He waved people away, yelling, 'I only want Meredith.' Meredith spied the man and initially

charged him, believing, for whatever reason, he could either reason with the man or snatch the gun away. He then peered into the man's eyes and knew better.

"Meredith bolted back toward the highway. He hardly made it there before three shotgun blasts sprayed him. He crumpled to the asphalt, dropping his walking stick and crying out in pain. An ambulance screamed up the highway. Not long after a Memphis hospital admitted Meredith, the Associated Press reported he was dead," Mitchell wrote.[vi]

Four days later, members of an Adams County White Knights cell known as the Cottonmouth Moccasin gang kidnapped a black farmer and murdered him. The farmer, described by Mitchell as "a quiet man with a shiny gold tooth, a humble man who could hardly read but could still quote long passages from the Bible" was neither a civil rights worker nor was he registered to vote.

Planning to lure Rev. Martin Luther King to Natchez, the cell members shot Deacon Ben Chester White on June 10, 1966. White had worked most of his life as a caretaker on a Natchez plantation and had no involvement in civil rights work. FBI agents arrested Ernest Fuller, Ernest Avants and James Jones four days later. FBI documents indicated that O'Dell Adams, the Adams Sheriff who led the local investigation of the White murder, was also a Klansmen.

Jones apologized at his April 1967 State trial, and obtained a hung jury.[vii] Eight months later, a State jury acquitted Ernest Avants after his lawyer argued that White was already dead "when Avants blew off his head with a shotgun. Five former jurors later agreed that two jurors had made up their minds before trial even began."[viii]

King appeared in Mississippi a few weeks later to participate in a march commemorating the second anniversary of the Neshoba killings. Although 300 white counter-protesters threw bottles, stones and firecrackers, punching black marchers and firing guns, King escaped unharmed

*Meredith's march re-started*

Major Civil Rights leaders remounted Meredith's march within days after the shooting, expanding it as they moved southward through the Delta. Seasoned civil rights movement veteran Bruce Hartford of Los Angeles was among the marchers and afterwards, as an SCLC field officer, was assigned to Grenada, Mississippi, the county seat of Grenada County located at the edge of the Delta, about 113 miles North of Jackson, halfway between the capital city and Memphis, Tenn.

The march achieved its greatest triumph in Grenada, a small town of about 10,000, since its local officials decided beforehand there would be less trouble the sooner the marchers left their town.

Marchers were not harassed and Grenada became an open city for that day as the activists sang and danced; one man climbed up the courthouse's Confederate monument to place an American flag over the statue of Jefferson Davis. Even this act of sacrilege went unchallenged as other blacks lined up to use the white only restrooms in the courthouse and stood in line to register to vote. Only 697 Grenada blacks were registered before the march – that number all but doubled overnight.

> George Lincoln Rockwell, head of the American Nazi Party, was "either in Jackson or somewhere else in Mississippi," wrote Erle Johnston in a memorandum to Sovereignty Commission files dated June 30, 1967. And he was not happy about Meredith's march.
> "Rockwell was very angry at what happened to his seven Nazi Party members who came to Mississippi from Dallas, Texas, with the idea of breaking up the James Meredith march. The first four Nazis were jailed in Hernando on criminal syndicalism charges and they are still in jail in lieu of $100.
> "Three other [Nazi] came in from Dallas. One was arrested at Hernando on a traffic charge and two were arrested in Oxford for disturbing the peace. All three were escorted to the state line by Highway Patrol members and told not to come back to Mississippi."
> One of the three was Robert Surrey, who was on the campus during the Ole Miss riot of 1962, and for a time was chauffer for retired U.S. Major General Edwin P. Walker, Johnston's report ended.[ix]

In most other towns along the route, particularly in Greenwood, Philadelphia, and Canton, the march gained militancy as police arrested marchers, brutalizing them and hauling them off to jail. It was in Greenwood where Carmichael, just bonded out of jail, told a crowd of 600 that "[T]his is the 27th time I have been arrested – I ain't going to jail no more" and then shouted five times, "We want black power!"

"Every courthouse in Mississippi ought to be burned tomorrow to get rid of the dirt," he yelled out to the crowd. The entire nation would get Carmichael's message.[x]

Analyzing the Mississippi Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, historian Dittmer who was a SNCC volunteer, himself, observed that Carmichael's Greenwood speech was a "dramatic public revelation of a course that SNCC had decided on" when Carmichael replaced John Lewis as chairman in May:

> Subject as it was to many interpretations, the slogan's ambiguity for a time enhanced its appeal. Most white Americans quickly came to see black power as a threat, as "racism in reverse" with violent implications. During his Greenwood speech, Carmichael had come close to a working definition (one largely ignored by the press) when he said that "we have to do what every group in this country did – we gotta take over the community where we outnumber people so we can have decent jobs." For black Mississippians this made sense – it was what they had been about since the first voter registration drive in McComb. Nonetheless, "black power" became the bogeyman for much of the media covering the march, and as such it created problems for the moderate civil rights leadership symbolized by Martin Luther King.[xi]

Not all agree with Dittmer's analysis. Margaret Block spent time with Stokely Carmichael in Tallahatchie County and often found him "rude and arrogant – someone who talked down to us." "When he first came

into Mississippi, Carmichael disregarded the existing community leaders, including her brother Sam Block, and immediately took over. My brother Sam left for college in Vermont and later went to California."

"It seemed like Carmichael and several others who came here from Howard University really thought they were smarter and better. They talked down to many of the black volunteers and sometimes put us in danger. Once I went to a meeting where Carmichael was really exaggerating a thick black-type accent because he though everyone there – mostly sharecroppers – was ignorant and that was the only way they could understand him."

Once Carmichael drove Margaret Block to Tallahatchie County and the two were followed in a truck by Klansmen with guns. "Stokely kept looking back, which he should not have done, and the Klansmen got mad and chased us back to Greenwood." Block questions if Stokely Carmichael was part of a COinTELPro operation. "I've often wondered who he was really representing. I do think that he and several other black men from Howard thought they had 'saved the South' by the time they left here."[xii]

Block believes it was a mistake to "run out" the white volunteers." Most of the white Northerners who came here were wonderful. They cared about us and what we were doing. There were very few who spoke down to us like Carmichael. We were working well together and he stopped this from happening. It was Stokely Carmichael and several others who really broke up SNCC. "[xiii]

THE MARCH MOVED on southward through the Delta to Belzoni, where Rev. George Lee had been murdered eleven years earlier, and on through several other small cotton towns. Then Rev. Martin Luther King split off and left for Philadelphia to hold a service on the anniversary of the murders of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner; King and this group were attacked with clubs while police and Justice Department observers and FBI agents looked on.

In Canton, north of Jackson, officials refused to allow marchers to pitch tents on the town's black school ground. The crowd numbered about 3,500 people and was faced off by sixty-one state troopers lined up in full battle gear, carrying a mass of weapons.

The troopers fired tear gas into the crowd and then waded in with guns and nightsticks. One journalist on the scene observed, "They came stomping in behind the gas, gun-butting and kicking the men, women, and children."

"This is the very state patrol that President Johnson said today would protect us. Anyone who will use gas bombs on women and children can't and won't protect anybody," Rev. King told reporters.

The riot in Canton would equal in ferociousness the assault on Selma, Alabama marchers one year earlier. "After the Selma violence the president had federalized the National Guard to protect the demonstrators marching to Montgomery, but the Johnson administration's response to the events in Canton was strikingly different.

"The next day Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach merely said that he 'regretted' the use of tear gas against the marchers, for 'it always makes the situation more difficult.'" Katzenbach refused to condemn the police action, commenting that the whole matter was under investigation.[xiv]

The rest of Meredith's march was quiet as he rejoined marchers and led a group to Tougaloo College, where 9,000 supporters attended a mass rally. On Sunday, June 26, the march ended at the capital grounds in Jackson as nearly 15,000 people drew together to hear Martin Luther King declare the march and rally to go down in history "as the greatest demonstration for freedom ever held in the state of Mississippi."

Shouts of "black power" were heard, leading media coverage to begin "a shift away from racial injustice in Mississippi to the ideological differences between Carmichael and King," even though the controversy was of "minor importance to the thousands of black Mississippians who had cheered both King and Carmichael on the steps of the capitol."[xv] While the march ended, the violence did not:

In July, the home of a black minister in Laurel was shot into. When desegregated schools opened two months later, black children in Grenada were attacked by white mobs.

In December, two people shot a black youth attempting to obtain service at the Chow House Cafe in Laurel.

Two months later, a similar incident occurred in Carrollton Mississippi.[xvi]

On February 27, 1967, Natchez NAACP treasurer Wharlest Jackson was killed after he accepted a job formerly held by a white man at the Armstrong Tire and Rubber Company. His murderers used a car bomb similar to the one that had crippled George Metcalf in 1965. The bomb exploded minutes after he left work one day, killing him instantly.[xvii]

On March 13, a bomb destroyed the office of the Southwestern Mississippi Child Development Council in Liberty, Mississippi.[xviii] In June, the Civil Rights Division compiled a report on the progress of Federal Civil Rights cases involving racial violence.

Of the cases filed in Mississippi since January 1965, six resulted in acquittals and the charges dismissed in another. Three were awaiting trial.[xix]

*SCLC Moves into Grenada*

This small city at the edge of the Delta in Grenada County[xx] represented the greatest success in Meredith's march and its people were now resolved to return Dr. King's organization to their community.

Bruce Hartford, a seasoned civil rights activist and SCLC field staff organizer recalled the initial enthusiasm shown as Meredith marchers reached Grenada:

> The outpouring of support from [Grenada's] Black community stunned everyone, including the community itself. It was more than just a large turn-out at the mass meeting and the numbers who showed up and demanded to be registered; it was the non-violent equivalent of a mass people's uprising against centuries of oppression. They begged Dr. King and the SCLC staff to stay with them in Grenada and help them build a successful movement. But the Meredith March had to be completed first, so Dr. King promised them that as soon as the March finished in Jackson, he and the SCLC staff would return to Grenada.[xxi]

THE WESTERN PORTION of Grenada County dips down into the rich cotton country of the Delta. Many black men, women, and children had always contributed to the wealth of their county, but few ever enjoyed the benefits of working in this isolated region that was so like many other parts of Mississippi.

Two years before the Meredith march in 1964, nine out of every ten people in Grenada County were born and raised in Mississippi, but “not many ‘foreigners’ move to Grenada, at least not to stay,” according to an SCLC profile on the county, and more than half of the county's population were living in the rural areas.

Half the population had a year-round steady job; the other half did not. The county’s population was 18,000 at this time. [xxii]

Grenada was small, resembling most Mississippi counties, but big enough to contain two separate and unequal worlds. Half the population of both county and town was black (9,061 African Americans in the county). Typically, blacks completed 5.1 years of school.

For whites, the number of years was 12.1. At least 300 black adults had never attended any school at all; only 82 were college graduates. The median income for black families was $1401, for whites, it was approximately $4300. In 1966, the U.S. Government defined "poverty" for a family of four as an annual total income under $3300.

Most of the population of Grenada County was supported by Agriculture. Corn, peanuts, and sorghum were slowly replacing the traditional cotton. Machines were swiftly replacing the traditional black field hand and by 1966, almost all of the black sharecroppers had lost their land, their farms turned over to the machines. The former sharecroppers had either left the county or were subsisting on day labor.

Grenada the town, with a population then of 8,000, sits halfway between Memphis and Jackson on a main North-South road (Highway 51). “Perched on the hills that border the eastern edge of the Mississippi Delta, the Yalobusha River flows past the North side of town. There is little industry: a few lumber mills, a hosiery factory, an air-conditioner workshop, and some other light industries. Only a few Negroes work in these plants,” Hartford observed.

> As you drive through Grenada's tree-shaded, paved streets past red-brick homes on wide green lawns you know you are in Grenada's white world. Grenada's Negro world exists on dusty dirt roads, with small, weather- beaten "shotgun" shacks crammed side by side into every available inch of land. Negroes still sit in the rear of the four Greyhound busses that briefly pause each day at the bus depot. Negroes are not permitted to enter the library. White women work behind the desks and cash registers of downtown Grenada, Negro women push the mops and scrub the floors.
>
> Grenada County has always been a segregation stronghold. Over the previous century there have been a number of lynchings — four in one day in 1885. Few Negroes are registered to vote, and fewer still dare cast ballots. None get "uppity," not if they want to stay. There has never been any significant Civil Rights Movement activity in the county, it was considered too tough a nut to crack. In May of 1966, Grenada still lived as if it were 1886.[xxiii]

Before the Meredith marchers left Grenada, more than 1,000 local blacks registered to vote as the city's administration backed down to the marchers' challenges. Holding to Dr. Martin Luther King's promise, SCLC field workers returned to Grenada at the end of the march. Unlike SNCC leaders – SCLC staff believed that in all Black communities where they worked, black community organization already existed, usually around the Black church. SCLC representatives also operated on the belief that local leaders were already developed, often the SCLC-affiliated ministers.

SCLC already HAD A PRESENCE in Ruleville and Cleveland, southwest of Grenada, as early as 1962 when Rev. James Bevil recruited Fannie Lou Hamer, Margaret Block and others to work for the organization. Both Hamer and Block were sent to the Dorchester citizenship school in Macon, Georgia for initial training.

Bevel and his wife, Diane Nash Bevel, were well known leaders in the movement, Bevel with SCLC and Nash with the new and upcoming SNCC. Both had ended up in Jackson as Freedom Riders in 1961; Nash, who could pass a white and could use this to her advantage, was eloquent in her speaking and writing, recalled Block who later joined SNCC out of admiration of Nash for her strength and determination.

Nash would say that Mississippi was the hardest state that she had come into – her first introduction as a Freedom Rider. In Mississippi, "despite the singular bravery of Medgar Evers," there was virtually no infrastructure. In Jackson, accompanying the Riders, Nash was given the job of supporting the riders as they were arrested or "going around with a bunch of change in her pocket, ready to make collect calls if something happened." Her partner was Len Holt, a black attorney from Mississippi.

SCLC strategy differed from SNCC's tactics in that mostly attract people of lesser education and community influence, those who had been prevented from completing their education,[xxiv] and young mothers of little financial means, for example, Hartford said.

"In every town that I know of where SCLC sent in staff workers, at the end of the project the SCLC-affiliated churches were larger and stronger than at the beginning, and the local leaders who worked with SCLC (primarily preachers and some professionals and Black business people) ended with more prestige and more power *vis-à-vis* both the Black community and the white power structure,"[xxv] Hartford said.

SCLC churches "were typically involved in political and economic issues that tended to advance the interests of the Black elite, its ministers, professionals, land and business owners, while SNCC's focus was on building new organizations that would represent and advance the interests of the lower strata of the Black community who were the overwhelming majority of the Black population."

Rarely articulated by civil rights movement observers was this "inherent" class conflict between "the new organizations that SNCC was trying to build, and the existing already powerful church-based organizations that SCLC was strengthening."

But no sooner than SCLC moved into Grenada, it was apparent that the culture of Dr. King's organization was very different from that of SNCC's. SCLC was involved in marches and direct-action in Grenada, "because that's what the people wanted. They were very clear about that. SCLC did not impose that vision on the people of Grenada, quite the opposite."

SNCC's working motto, "Let the People Decide," was actually operational in both camps; only "the people" making decisions within SNCC or SCLC were typically constituted from very different groups.

In Grenada, this usual distinction did not hold: "The determination to visibly defy the hated white power structure by marching cut across all class lines. The class division, instead, came around what kind of organization, what economic goals, the negotiations with the whites, who got elected to office, and so on." Hartford explained.

SNCC workers tried to organize in Grenada, at the same time – but around a Black Power program. But SNCC got "absolutely nowhere" because "it was not what the Grenada Black community was interested in."

> Occasionally someone would repeat in puzzlement something they had heard from a SNCC worker and ask us what it meant -- that's how I knew there were SNCC folks in town, but to the extent that Grenada folk understood SNCC's program it had zero support. I respected the early SNCC views and to some degree shared it (the desire to build grassroots organizations that represented the economic interests of the poor majority). But I also understood the need and value of mass direct-action, marches, desegregation, boycotts, and so on.[xxvi]

SCLC's representatives recognized that Grenada's white citizens were not rolling over to activists' demands from the SCLC as they had during the Meredith March; instead, the city became site of one of the "longest-sustained and most violent mass movements" of the era – for voter registration, jobs, and school desegregation.

The white community was not as ready for change as Dr. King's group anticipated, hence Grenada's movement ended up lasting longer than any of the other mass movements: "Longer than Birmingham, longer than Selma, Albany, St. Augustine, Natchez. I mean lasting longer in terms of how long people kept mass direct-action going." Hartford had been directly involved in the Selma movement, giving him basis for comparison.

Daily mass marches took place in Grenada for the next four or five months in the face of angry Klan mobs and were "equal in many ways to Selma in terms of the popular support. Didn't get the publicity, but we did [important] things in Grenada." [xxvii]

Most marches occurred at night, allowing day workers to take part but also making it easier for the Klan to mobilize mobs. "... [I]t was dangerous because the Klan could hide behind the darkness. We would march up to the square, 150, 200, 250 of us, circle around the square, and some nights the Klan would have 500 or more people. Not every night of course, but many nights."

When school opened that fall on September 12, close to 250 black students signed up to attend the white public school, something that had not occurred anywhere else around the entire state. That day Hartford was stationed at SCLC headquarters when a television reporter ran in "totally freaked."

The reporter -- obviously beaten himself -- yelled to his editor on the telephone, demanding that his boss "call the governor" to bring in the National Guard: "And then suddenly the little children are coming in[to the office]. Screaming. Bloody. Elementary school kids. Been beaten the shit out of," Hartford gasped.[xxviii]

Klan members were seen driving pickup trucks with two-way radios "scouting where the kids were walking so the mob could find them. It was like in Birmingham and Montgomery when the first Freedom Riders came in. But these were just kids," Hartford said.

Most of the Klan violence and the ambush of the elementary children occurred that morning, in attempt to keep black students from reaching the school. For those who did manage to get inside, classes met for half a day. By afternoon the size of the KKK mob had diminished some, "though it was still substantial." Most of the afternoon violence was mainly directed at the Black high school kids who were leaving class; no local or county law enforcement officers ever moved to help the children or arrest their attackers:

> Shortly before school let out, all of the white girls were ordered to report to the principal's office, they were then escorted out through the Klan mob. When school let out, the white boys were free to join the mob, and the Black high school students, boys and girls, had to either pass through the mob or manage to reach one of the cars we were trying to get through to pick them up.
> FBI agents took pictures and communicated with each other through walkie-talkies. Sheriff Ingram himself watched five white men pull a ten-year-old black boy to the ground and pummel him. Ingram started toward them, hesitated then walked away. Whites in pickup trucks cruised the area and attacked black parents and children in their cars. Altogether, more than thirty black children were assaulted that day; several were hospitalized. Two Memphis reporters and a photographer were also beaten. Although probably no more than seventy-five whites were involved in the beatings, they were cheered on by nearly 400 bystanders, including cursing and screaming women.... On Monday night 500 whites protested at city hall, after Governor Johnson sent state troopers into Grenada. "You get the Highway Patrol out of here and in 24 hours [or] there won't be a nigger left," one man shouted to a city council member.[xxix]

Joan Baez was visiting Grenada that day along with non-violent teachers, Ira and Sandy Sandperl. "She was heavy into non-violence then. They had some sort Non-Violent Institute or something and they were in town to help. So that day, Joan Baez ... said she was going to go down to the school and chain herself to the flagpole as a protest. And we had a hell of a time arguing her out of that, because we were certain she would have been killed."[xxx]

Quickly, the entire county, black and white, became a tinderbox and SCLC's community field workers faced a new set of problems, keeping black families from taking on their aggressors. "That was what members of the white power structure were trying to provoke. They were ready and waiting for that and they desperately wanted some instance of violence from our side so that they could just, you know, go military. And it was hard. It was really hard to keep that from happening. Fortunately we were able to do so."[xxxi]

While some school children were scared off by the angry mob, 150 school children returned to further harassment and attacks. Black students organized some walkouts and boycotts and white students were encouraged to go against the blacks. "Whenever Black kids did anything, or were framed for doing something they didn't do, they got expelled. By the end of the year, I think they were down to half that or less, because some had been driven out. But 75 or so stuck it out," Hartford said:

> Black students reported constant acts of harassment by white students throughout the fall term, staging a two-week school boycott as a protest. On September 17, thirteen men were charged by the FBI for assaulting the Grenada students. Most were store owners and service station operators, one a justice of the peace. But on June of 1967, an all-white jury found eight of the men not guilty…. The violence in Grenada represented "a premeditated assault on black children approved by local law officials, not a spontaneous outburst by an uncontrolled mob.[xxxii]

While later in the week city officials were ordered by the circuit court to protect black students from further attacks, "it is absolutely incredible that it could have happened as many times as it did with so little reaction on the part of public officials," historian John Dittmer observed.

Two years after the Grenada riots ended, fewer than 8,000 black students were enrolled in previously white Mississippi public schools, just 3.9 percent of the total black school-age population. Yet Mississippi's civil rights battles became less important in the public's eye, as they competed with Northern ghetto riots and militant black power speeches of activists coming from SNCC's new leader, Stokely Carmichael, and his all-black followers. [xxxiii]

*Segregation, poverty remain in Mississippi*

By the end of 1966, there were very few positive signs in the Magnolia state as Mississippi was still segregated and its poverty programs were fighting to stay alive. SNCC did not renew its commitment to the state, mostly because the organization was suffering its own internal problems that focused on the switch to black power.

Its most famous Mississippi member, Fannie Lou Hamer, resigned in protest when SNCC voted to expel all white members:  At SNCC's annual dinner Hamer let out her feelings when she "turned on her old friends, as much in sadness as in anger, for growing 'cold and unloving."'[xxxiv] SNCC now had little impact on the Mississippi movement and the same held true for CORE.

That fall, Hamer worked to reorganize black and white activists as several MFDP candidates ran for public office. Meeting in Jackson, they agreed to work with economic development, fund-raising, and federal programs, as well as political education.

Local activists would not give up, even after national SNCC and CORE leaders left their state. They simply went back to work at attaining their voting rights while receiving little help from the federal government and its agencies that were supposed to assist them.

While Mississippi activist Mrs. Annie Devine was left to observe, "What could have been a beautiful revolution just petered out,"[xxxv] But this was not necessarily so. The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement evolved and changed as many pledged to keep up their important work.

The MFDP stayed open to white participation and worked with the integrated staff of the Delta Ministry led by Owen Brooks, who came to Mississippi as a volunteer from Massachusetts. A professional engineer, Brooks focused on finding solutions to economic problems and stayed on to become a permanent Mississippi resident.

The National Council of Churches had established the Delta Ministry in 1964 to further the cause of civil rights in Mississippi – the southern state with the most violent white resistance. Headquartered in Greenville, the Delta Ministry at its peak had the largest field staff of any civil rights organization in the South.

Active for several years beyond its original ten-year mandate, the Delta Ministry outlasted SNCC, CORE, and SCLC in Mississippi, helping to fill the vacuums when these organizations fell apart or left the state.

The Ministry had its share of problems due to chronic under-funding and harassment by the Sovereignty Commission. Among its most interesting projects was a collective agricultural and manufacturing community built by displaced agricultural workers.

Two years after the Delta Ministry's founding, B. F. Smith, executive vice president of the Delta Council,[xxxvi] complained to the National Council of Churches about the Ministry through a report prepared "at the request of Bishop Pendergrass."

Smith cited a number of concerns including picketing of the Greenville Mill: the "so-called" strike at the W. B. Andrews plantation; activities of the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union; and the "invasion" of the Greenville Air Base "by the so-called Poor People's Conference."

Smith also enclosed several publications criticizing the Delta Ministry, including "a report by a group of 31 Methodist ministers and also by the highest policy-making body of the Protestant Episcopal church."

Calling for discontinuation – or at least reorganization – of the Delta Ministry, Smith asserted, "[it] has been a mission of agitation instead of reconciliation. It has accomplished nothing constructive but has actively promoted racial hatred and has tried to block efforts of both white and Negro leaders….

"The tactics employed have been revolutionary and the principle of 'the ends justify the means' appears to dictate actions and planning."[xxxvii]

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[i] Lance Hill, "The Deacons For Defense," (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2.

[ii] Ibid.

[iii] Ibid, 206.

[iv] After Meredith was shot on June 6, the first day of his 220-mile "March Against Fear," Rev. Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders decided to continue the protest. In Greenwood, Mississippi, Stokely Carmichael, the newly elected head of SNCC, and Willie Ricks used the slogan "Black Power" for the first time in front of reporters. The tensions between SCLC and SNCC grew wider, and Carmichael would later go on to become a major proponent of the newly emerging Black Power Movement.

[v] Jerry Mitchell, "The Last Days of Ben Chester White," *The Clarion-Ledger*, February 23, 2003.

[vi] Ibid. "It is fair to say that without Mitchell's dogged and often courageous reporting, not to mention an apparently beguiling charm that convinces people they should share secret records with him, many murders from the civil rights era would have remained unvindicated, locked forever in the vaults of regional amnesia," wrote journalist Kathleen Parker, "One man pursued justice for all," *Orlando Sentinal*, January 17, 2005.

[vii] In November 1968, the family of Ben Chester White, killed by members of the White Knights in June 1966, won a one million-dollar civil damage suit against three Klansmen and the White Knights organization. It was never collected, however. Also, six more convictions were obtained in the Dahmer case that year.

[viii] "Fuller was never tried…. Southern Poverty Law Center, "Remembering Reality," Hate in the News, article #136, 9 (Tolerance.org, September 2001); Jerry Mitchell, "The last days of Ben Chester White," *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, 23 February 2003; idem, "'66 Klan murder raising questions," *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, 18 January 2000. The FBI did not conduct an independent investigation at the time, according to a Justice Department Civil Rights Division report, because of "severe jurisdictional problems." Memorandum, Gene Livingston, Southwestern Section, to James L. Kelley, Appeals and Research Section, Civil Rights Division, "Racial Violence in Mississippi," 16 June 1967, reprinted in Belknap ed., "Racial Violence," 510. See also, Jerry Mitchell, "Suspect held in '66 Killing," *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, 8 June 2000." (Source: The FBI, COINTELPRO-WHITE HATE and the Decline of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in Mississippi, 1964-1971, online.)

[ix] Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission file(s) SCR ID # 1-67-4-156-1-1-1

[x] Dittmer, 396. Cites *NYT*, June 17, 1966; *National Observer*, June 20, 1966.

[xi] Ibid., 397. Cites *NYT*, June 17, 1966.

[xii] From several conversations with Block in 2004 and 2005.

[xiii] Interview with Margaret Block by Susan Klopfer, May 16, 2005.

[xiv] Ibid., 400. Cites *NYT*, June 26, 1966.

[xv] Dittmer, 400. Cites *NYT*, June 25, 1966.

[xvi] Livingston to Kelley, "Racial Violence in Mississippi," in Belknap, "Racial Violence," 511-512.

[xvii] The FBI also linked this murder to the Silver Dollar Group. Metcalf had also been an employee of the corporation. Newton, *KKK Encyclopedia*, 295; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 399.

[xviii] Livingston to Kelley, "Racial Violence in Mississippi," in Belknap ed., "Racial Violence," 512.

[xix] Summary of 241-242 Cases Fiscal 1966 To Present (June 1967), reprinted in Belknap ed., "Racial Violence," 513-516.

[xx] Grenada, located in North-central Mississippi about 100 miles south of Memphis, Tennessee, and about 110 miles North of Jackson, Mississippi, came into existence in July 1836 as the result of the merger of two rival towns - Pittsburgh and Tullahoma. Early in its history, Grenada obtained trade goods and shipped its cotton on small steamboats and keel-boats that travelled on the Yalobusha River. During the late 1850's and early 1860's, Grenada prospered as a headquarters for the construction of the Mississippi Central Railroad and the Mississippi and Tennessee Railroad.

[xxi] E-mail interview with Bruce Hartford, March 31, 2005.

[xxii] Bruce Hartford, "Grenada Mississippi 1966 Chronology of a Movement," (online at crmvet.org).

[xxiii] Ibid.

[xxiv] In Mississippi of that time, many poor Black were either driven out of the school system, or prevented by economic necessity from completing their schooling. And in many cases, plantation owners simply ordered their share-croppers, tenant farmers, and farm laborers to remove their children from school and send them to the fields.

[xxv] E-mail interview with Hartford, March 31, 2005.

[xxvi] From an interview with Sheila Michaels, *Veterans of the Southern Freedom Movement of the 1960s*, February 2002; also e-mail discussion with author, April 2, 2005.

[xxvii] Bruce Hartford, Civil Rights Movement Veterans (CRMV) website, http://www.crmvet.org last modified November 19, 2004.

[xxviii] Ibid.

[xxix] Hartford, e-mail interview.

[xxx] Bruce Hartford, CRMV website.

[xxxi] Hartford, e-mail interview.

[xxxii] Ibid.

[xxxiii] Dittmer, 405. Cites *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, September 13, 14, 15, 1966; *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, September 13, 14, 1966; *The Clarion-Ledger*, September 13, 14, 1966; *Newsweek*, September 16, 1966, "This Struggle Is Ours Too: The Grenada Story," Operation Freedom fund-raising brochure, copy in Cox Papers.

[xxxiv] Andrew Kopkind, "The Future of 'Black Power,' A Movement in Search of a Program," *New Republic*, CLVI (January 7, 1967), 16-18.

[xxxv] Dittmer, 408. Mrs. Devine made this statement on September 29,1968.

[xxxvi] Aaron Henry once defined this organization as "a white group providing a combined voice on the economic interests of the Delta" that "might best be described as an oversized chamber of commerce."

[xxxvii] A copy of this report was filed by the Sovereignty Commission. It is accompanied by a letter to the Office of the Governor, written by Smith on Delta Council stationery. SCR ID # 2-157-1-80-1-1-1.