

Freedom Singers: "Woke Up This Morning (With My Mind Stayed on Freedom)" Woke up this morning/ With my mind Stayed on Freedom/ I woke up this morning/ with my mind, Lord, stayed on freedom/ I woke up this morning/ with my mind stayed on freedom/ I pray, I pray, I Pray, Hallelujah Radio host: [singing continues in background] Revolution in Georgia: The Negro Struggle for Franchise. This is the third in a series of four programs produced for radio by Larry Rubin, a white Antioch student who worked for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Southwest Georgia's voter registration project. Tonight, "The Religious Revolution." Rubin examines the role of religion in the movement. Parts of the program you are about to hear were recorded in the field.

Larry Rubin: Southwest Georgia is in the Bible, and its travelers drive through your constantly reminded of it. The highway is lined with signs admonishing them to love God, and reminding them that Christ saves. Hundreds of churches put up signs inviting the traveler to come and worship, if of course the travelers white because the church is like everything else in this area, are strictly segregated. I have a Jewish cultural background, but organized religion as such, never played a very important part in my upbringing, but when I work in the South, I have to totally reorient myself. The words people use, their thoughts, their ideas are mostly all based on their interpretation of the Bible. Most white people in the South are thoroughly convinced that segregation is God ordained and can quote scripture in verse of the Bible to prove. In the Bible Belt in Southwest Georgia religion generally means a Southern Baptist Church, although there are scattering of the Methodist churches and one or two Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian churches. The religious teachings and ceremonies of both white and Negro church are almost identical because when the Negro slaves were brought from Africa to work in the cotton fields their white plantation owners gave them the religion of Christianity. Christianity historically has been used by the whites to perpetuate the segregation system and to keep Negroes in their place. At the basis of this is the idea of white supremacy. Segregation cannot exist without the idea that the white race is superior to the Negro race. All people conceive of their gods in their own image. All people gain a self validity because they feel they are in God's image. But the black man in the South worship a white Jesus Christ. There other ways it Christianity historically has been used to perpetuate the segregation system. The black preacher will preach that drunkenness is bad, but everybody knows that he means black drunkenness, because he will also teach that in order to get to heaven the Negro must fulfill his obligations to his master, to his boss, even if the boss is drunk. However, the church—this is the only place other than bars and the poolhalls where the white man is not present. Many Negroes spend all Sunday in church. It's a social gathering, it's a gossip time. As an attention release, they shout and moan and sing. But even here, Christianity historically has been used to keeping the Negro down because the faith of the Negro in the past has been to wait on the Lord, has been that God will take care of him. If only he fulfills his earthly functions well, God will take care of him. But in the past, this fervor and simple faith, has been used to also mean that it is almost sacrilegious for the Negro to work on earth to improve his earthly conditions. I remember in my canvassing, in talking to people, and trying to convince them to register and vote, the many theological discussions we had where "wait on the Lord" was used as a defense mechanism, was used as an escape from the real fear that people felt.

Unidentified man 1: His wife was just saying, you know, wait on the Lord. She said I'll let the Lord do my voting for me. Unidentified woman 1: She may mean that the Lord will fix this thing and she won't have to [unsure: (0:05:50)] Unidentified man 1: That's what she says. Unidentified woman 1: That's, that's probably what she means. Unidentified man 1: I'm realizing that God gave us health, strength, and life, and that he—after he gives you all these things, you shouldn't get up and smite these things. Unidentified man 2: I had a Bible with me, and I showed her, I showed her, whoever helps Him helps themselves.

Larry Rubin: but with the plantation owners gave their slaves Christianity, they gave them a two-prong sword, because Christianity, because faith in God has always been used by the Negro as a dynamic force and fighting to improve his condition. Because to give a man any kind of faith is to give him the idea that there somebody protecting him. The Negroes in the cotton fields would sing their spirituals, but the spirituals and not all refer to heaven and to the good life beyond, but to such concrete things of the underground railway and freedom from slavery here on earth. A very similar thing is happening today in the voter registration movement. Leaders of the voter registration movement are by and large ministers in reverends. They use the exact same words as any other minister, but in their mouths the words mean freedom here on earth, and not freedom we get to heaven. That this is so is exemplified by Mr. T.C. Chapman, who talks about when he was a boy sanctified church. The says that then the Negroes were praying for freedom and they still are. In the past, freedom has meant freedom beyond. Today, it means freedom now. Mr. T.C. Chapman: So I walked into this tent I thought about when I was a boy, and this tent reminded me of a tent that I used tend when I was a boy, what they call a sanctified church. Those people then were praying and singing as you are tonight. They were praying and singing for freedoms then. And I said—when I came into this tent—I said well, the Negro is still praying singing in tents for freedom.

Larry Rubin: And “wait on the Lord” has changed too. I once attended a sermon where their preacher said, it says “wait on the Lord” in the Bible, alright, but he said, look at what he Israelis were doing at the time. He says, they were fighting. They were fighting. They were waiting on a Lord to help them in their fight. Here is an elderly reverend giving a talk at a mass meeting Terrell County. The meeting is in a tent. A church used to stand at this site, but it was burned down last summer. The Reverend says, we have to live a good life here. He says we have to be sincere, but he also says we have to work to improve our conditions here. He says if we do all this God will help us. Unnamed Reverend: I say to you, let's stand up and, for the Lord. The only way we're going to get this thing completed, we have to be sincere in what we're doing. We've got the Lord and felt the bounty. Isn't that right? That same God that brought the Israelites of the desert. If we stand up and be sincere as we propose to be, he'll break down [unsure: (0:09:51)]

Larry Rubin: And because the voter registration movement has become so closely connected with the church, people who would otherwise be afraid to participate feel more familiar with movement, and do participate. Mr. Trim Porter, a Negro tenant farmer in Sumter County Georgia, had his house burned down. His two children were almost killed by night riders. Yet, he still participates in the movement and why: because the movement holds meetings at his church, and he feels that the church is his home.

Mr. Trim Porter: They can come with all the machines in the world they want, but if they have a meeting out there in that church as long as I [unsure: (0:10:38)] I can't go. I want to, but that church got burnt just like my house. After everybody goes my house, I'm going to see what they're doing. I said make [unsure: 0:10:50)] meeting, and I said..the church house have a meeting. After we drive in stayed, we sang, we prayed, and have our meeting.

Larry Rubin: Negro attorney CB King, from Albany Georgia makes this two-pronged sword explicit. He

explains how the Christianity, which was forced upon his ancestors by the white plantation owners, has been used to justify the Negro voter registration movement.

CB King: It is a powerful, a divine law, that God Almighty believes in equality. Then if we be the Christians that we profess to be, we demand the fulfillment of what is divine. We demand equality because it is good, and when we say good we mean God and God-like. And I think that, we all would [unsure: (0:12:04)] to say that, though we be afraid, for many reasons maybe, we know that this is right, and it represents the fulfillment of what is required of us as the Christians we profess to be. How do we show that we believe in this? Well I think one way would be do the sort of things that you in here gather demonstrating an interest in. You would translate what you pray about, what you shout about, what you preach about, into a reality—a fulfillment, an accomplishment of doing. How do you take voting and registration and related to what I've been talking about as representative of what is divine—what appears to be a divine law of Almighty God. I think that you'd be able to do that simply by saying it is our responsibility to sanction, to approve, to encourage laws that conform to the laws handed down to us by Almighty God, and that is to our conscious of what is right. But how do we—how, how do we help create these laws? With our form of government there is one way. That is by registering and voting. Larry Rubin: Faith in God helps in many ways to overcome fear. When the whites burned down the church last summer, many people became afraid. But the elderly reverend, who was the pastor of the church, says that you can't burn down a church because the church is in the heart of the people. That is, you can't destroy our faith because the phase is when—it's within us. The faith within us will help us to overcome.

Elderly Reverend: I welcome you all to this tent, to this church that's been destroyed. Because the church is been destroyed on the account of the freedom riders. I've been pastor here this coming year...for thirty years at the spot. So we open the door for them to come in, let them hold a meeting. That's why she's destroyed. I heard they're going to burn it down, but I told them, if they burn it down were going to build a new one. [clapping] So they, they burned down the building but they didn't burn the church down.

Larry Rubin: Bible says give unto Caesar what is due unto to Caesar, but give unto God what is due unto God. In the past, many people have used this to justify segregation. They say, well we are really free, but we have to give unto Caesar what is due unto Caesar, and that is our toil, and our work, and our dignity, here on earth. Yet now, many people are beginning to realize that they have been giving unto Caesar what is due unto God; that is, a man's right to have freedom on earth. They realize that the segregation system inherently is putting the white man before God. That they are afraid of the white man, but that, if they have faith in God, if you have religious dignity, then they must take sacrifices, they must do things that the white man might not like.

Unidentified man 3: And it, it don't, it don't assure that you is exercising your faith in God when you just continue and come on and dread man rather than God. You do the thing wrong that the Lord says was wrong, and the thing was against your soul, and you ahead on, and you know—God got all power in his hands. He can take you off the face of earth any time he get ready. But still you fear man rather than God. So, that's the only weak part it is, is our religion why its so weak. Now I believe that God will take care of us. I, I, I, I've been laid off a second time, but I haven't got worried a bit yet. Every time I'm, I'm laid off I have something important to do, and I'm still, I'm not worried. Not about the job or being freezed out or anything like that. God will make a way for me. [clapping]. Larry Rubin: But all those of movement in the South is basically a redemption—of the religion of the Negro—is basically bringing the religion into line with Negroes feelings about their condition on earth. It's very difficult for many people to change especially ministers,

whose very lives, whose very jobs, whose very livelihoods depend upon preaching what I would call escapist religion, who—ministers who have gained a certain status in the eyes of both white and Negro and who are afraid to rock the boat. Mr. James Mayes, a farmer from Lee County, Georgia, whose home was shot into, tells about the minister, who is very typical of the majority of ministers even today.

Mr. James Mayes: He has had the weakness, as a minister, of accepting the system totally. His sermons are not concerning voter registration or civil rights or social justice, but in cases where they refer to living the good life for becoming economical independent, they had some significance and they were to the point I think. Larry Rubin: (0:19:39). When workers of the student nonviolent coordinating committee move into a new area in the South they live with the people for a long time. They try to interpret the people's wants and desires and talk try to give them form and direction. In many ways, this puts them into direct competition with, with ministers. SNCC people live like ministers, are put by the people on the same plane as ministers. And because many of the ministers are old and are afraid of losing what they have, they resent SNCC people very much, they resent the whole movement very much. Mister Bruner, a leader of the movement Terrell County, explains what happened when he went to one of the Methodist churches to ask the congregation if he might use the church for voter registration meeting. He got a favorable response from most of the people at the church. The board of deacons voted in the majority to give the church to the movement, and most people who had attended the service that Sunday told Mister Bruner that there be very happy if the movement would come to their church. But the preacher of the church was dead against it. Preacher: I was [unsure: (0:21:13)] and. So I enjoyed service and sit and help [unsure: (0:21:27)] up to lift the altar, and so I got up and I lift collection I told him, I said right after this collection I would, I would like to make a little statement, at least there's something I want to ask you or something, if you are in too big of a hurry after I lift collection. So I got, lift collection then I began going to talk about voter registration, so I told him that, about how the church, some of that church meetings you have had at...church [unsure: (0:22:05)] time or two. And so since our church had got burned down, and we was holding, still holding in this tent, I said it got kind of cold. And of course, we have heat in there but, I think a building would be a little bit better, so I came to ask you all today could we use this church to hold our voter registration, part of its cold and to it'll probably get a little warmer, if he didn't have any objection. And so than the pastor said, well—he got up, said, well brother I tell you, he said that voter registration, what the people have been—the movement, he didn't think like that he was saying. Said that done cause so much trouble around through the country. He said I know it's cold in that tent, and of course we don't have insurance and we can't get none. [unsure: (0:23:08)] nowhere to have service. I said, and another thing is that we don't have a deed to this church. Larry Rubin: Nowhere is religious content of the movement more evident than in the songs that the movement. Music is very important. It gives courage where there is a lack of courage. It gives unity where there is a lack of unity. An elderly woman, sharecropper, told me this story. She said that she had taken part in a mass demonstration in Albany, and she, along with about seven hundred other people, were put in jails. And the jails overflowed, and she and twelve other women were put in the cell that was only built for four people. They kept her in there for eight days. The woman said that for eight days she sat on the cold concrete floor and prayed and sang. She prayed and sang for the sheriff. At first the sheriff came over and told her, no damn singing and no more than praying, but she continued to pray and to sing. She said, after three or four days the sheriff—she could see the sheriff creeping up and, and, and sort of listening to the songs but not saying anything. And she said when she left the sheriff told her with, with a bit of admiration: you're the singing-ist damn nigger I ever saw. Mr. Slater King, the vice president of the Albany movement,

tells the people of Terrell County, who are gathered in the tent, what he felt like when he entered the tent and heard them singing. Mr. Slater King: to come in here with you is a very warm, a very moving experience. One of them was moved to tears as one comes in and listen to the people saying. And it's a funny thing that [unsure: (0:25:11)], the sincerity of them, the degree of it—that our hearts and our minds can't help but react to it. In other words, when people sing a song and put all they feel and all of their soul into it, it is something [unsure: (0:25:23)] that you know and you feel that's instinctively almost, and this is how it feels in the stent tonight; that is, a very warm, a very moving experience.

Larry Rubin: Here's the songs that Mr. King heard. I'm going to sit at the freedom table one of these days and Oh Lord, guide my feet while I run this race

Mass Meeting in Tent: [singing] We're going to eat at the freedom table/ we can eat at the freedom table one of these days/ hallelujah/ where can eat at the freedom table/ eat at the freedom table one of these days  
[audio changes]

Mass Meeting in Tent: [singing] Guide my feet while I run this race/ Guide my feet while I run this race/ guide my feet while I run this race/ for I don't want to run this race in vain/ Hold my hand while I run this race/ Lord, hold my hand while I run this race/ hold my hand why run this race/ for I don't want to run this race in vain

[audio changes]

Freedom Singers:[singing] Woke up this morning/ With my mind Stayed on Freedom/ I woke up this morning/ with my mind, Lord, stayed on freedom/ I woke up this morning/ with my mind stayed on freedom/ I prayed, I Prayed, I Prayed, Hallelujah

Radio host: [singing continues in background] Revolution in Georgia: The Negro Struggle for Franchise. This has been the third in a series of four programs produced for radio by Larry Rubin, a white Antioch college student who worked as a volunteer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Southwest Georgia's voter registration project. Next week: Where are The Going? Rubin will discuss the future of the movement. Parts of this program are recorded in the field, the song "wake up in the morning" was sung by the freedom singers.