

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/ Halle, Halle, Halle-lujah Radio host: [singing continues in background] Revolution in Georgia: The Negro Struggle for Franchise. This is the first 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 movement. Tonight, Rubin discusses the organization and function of the movement. Parts of this program you are about to hear were recorded in the field.

Unidentified woman 1: My mother, my grandmother, and they all of them died in slaves. Now I'm fighting for my rights. Give me my rights, please.

Larry Rubin: Southwest Georgia is peanuts, pecans, and cotton country. It's in the blackbelt—so called either because the majority of people are Negro or because of the black earth. I've heard both reasons and both are true. Negroes outnumber whites more than two-to-one in Lee, Terrell, and Sumter counties. All political and economic power is firmly controlled by whites. Before the Civil War, this was slave plantation country. Today, a lot of the land is still owned by the grandchildren of slave owners—holders, and worked by the grandchildren of the slaves.

The special report published by the United States Civil Rights Commission in 1961 and entitled Voting deals at length with Lee County. The average Negro in Lee county has gone to school only 3.2 years; the average White, almost 10 years. The average White person earns 1,571 dollars annually; the average Negro, only 478 dollars a year. When I worked in Lee, I found out for a fact that a Negro field hand in Lee is often paid only fifteen dollars a week during the crop picking season, and as automatic pickers are replacing human labor, jobs are becoming even scarcer. The Commission's Report says that out of close to the 4,000 Negroes living in Lee County, less than 29 were registered to vote in 1960, although most of the 2,000 whites were registered. Reverend Charles Sherrod, the head of the Southwest Georgia registration project, of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, told me that there were only two kinds of classes in Southwest Georgia: the owners, and the sharecroppers and day laborers. In other words, wealthy Whites and poor Negroes. There used to be some poor Whites, but most of them migrated to the factories. The first day I came to Southwest Georgia to work with the S.N.C.C. [says each letter] or SNCC [pronounces "Snick"], Reverend Sherrod drove me through Lee County and Terrell County. He showed me piles of rubble that had once been churches. They had been burned down by irate Whites because Negroes were using them for voter registration meetings. He showed me a field where a Negro body had turned up last summer riddled with bullets and castrated. In Lee County, Sherrod showed me the tree where several Negroes had been lynched by a White mob. That tree stands as a reminder to Negroes of the White man's power. Sherrod introduced me to the leaders of the local voter registration movement. They showed us the bullet holes in their walls. White night riders had shot into their houses. I was overwhelmed and frightened. I asked one of them if the police had caught the people who shot into the house. He laughed. He had contacted the sheriff the first time, but all the sheriff did was accuse him of shooting into his own house. The shooting involved the intimidation of people trying to register to vote. Justice Department officials and FBI agents

investigated, but it seems that the only person they questioned were the homeowner himself, and as yet they have brought in so suspects.

Still in Lee County, Sherrod turned the car off the black top road. Most of what passes for roads in Lee are just ruts cut between the pecan and cotton fields. Sherrod explained that most of the poor people lived back here in the fields. This is where SNCC begins its real work. We were visiting Mrs. Annie Raines, one of the first people in Lee County to organize her friends to register. Mrs. Raines is a good example of how the Negro people in the South are changing. She had been a nurse and a midwife, and everybody calls her "Mama Dolly." She has helped most of the White women in the county give births. She was a "good nigger." She had gained love of the Whites: they would give her their old clothes, and give her small loans, and sell her goods on credit; but as soon as she started to register, and began encouraging others to do likewise, she lost the Whites' paternalistic affection. She lost all her nursing jobs and her credit. She became ostracized by a large part of the Negro community as well, because they had been warned by their White bosses to stay away from her. Her home was attacked by night riders. A former mayor of Dawson, in Terrell County has said: this is a feudalistic system, but I don't know how, or if, it will be changed. And at first it might appear that it would be impossible to start any kind of movement at all in Lee County. It's a large county in area, but its people are live widely scattered. There are no urban centers. During slavery days, there had been sporadic rebellions, and there had been many individuals from time to time who have challenged the segregation system. For instance, James Mayes, a Negro farmer, said that his fathers and brothers had tried to vote several years ago. They couldn't because they were threatened with guns, but it wasn't it until the summer of 1962 that a coordinated mass movement began. The Negroes of Lee and Terrell County were inspired by the mass anti-segregation demonstrations in the nearby city of Albany. They adopted methods used in the city to their own needs, and began a movement to improve the conditions of the schools and to register to vote. Here's Dr. W.G. Anderson, a physician and past head of the Albany movement, exemplifying the explosion of Negro feeling: Unidentified Man 1: What happened to the Negroes down there in Southwest Georgia?

Dr. W.G. Anderson: We just decided that we wasn't going to take it anymore. We just decided that we going to stop going to the back door [soft chorus of agreement in background]. We going to stop bowing and scraping and a scratching where we don't itch and grinning we [unsure: 0:07:59]. [soft chorus of "here, here" in the background]. This is a Negro who is not afraid any longer, as we say in that song, "we are not afraid," we sing it from the bottom of our hearts because we really mean it. It a Negro who walks and holds his head up high, and as long as he holds his head up high he cannot be enslaved, because you have to bend down and bow down to become a slave. The [unsure: (0:08:22)] Negro have a dream. It's a dream of being a first-class citizen, and his dream has been filled with nightmares from many years past. Many of us can remember [unsure: (0:08:35)] infliction of bodily harm and pain that has come to Negroes down through the generations. I can yet remember so vividly and it hasn't been too long ago, the Negro who was shot down on the courthouse steps in Baker County, and was tied to the back of an automobile and dragged around. In this day and generation, I can remember there vividly, as any as last year, a Negro who was in jail in Bainbridge, Georgia because he said he said he would vote against Marvin Griffin if he was out of jail and could vote, was beaten and died. Last year's nightmares are in our dreams, but we have, at the end of the dream, a shining light that says on it freedom, and we know that that road to freedom is a long and narrow road. We know that one side that there's briars and bramble bushes and we know on the other side there are cottonmouth moccasins and diamondback rattle snakes. We know that segregation and discrimination

will be over our heads every inch of the way, but we keep our eyes set on that little light at the end of the road that shines for freedom. This is the dream of the American Negro. We here in Terrell County—and the Negroes over in Dougherty County, and the Negroes in Lee County, and the Negroes in Baker County—have decided that aren't going to take it any longer. They decided that they will not have their backs bent and [unsure: (0:10:04)] anymore. They are determined to be free and nothing can turn them around, because the change has come from within, and once the change has started from within there is no turning back. The martyr has already mounted the cross. He has felt the pierce of spear in his side. He cannot come down off the cross. He will stay there. He will suffer, bleed, and die until he is free. I look forward to the day when I can exert myself as a man downtown and demand what is rightfully mine and get it without fear of any retaliation, without fear of my life being lost and my body being harmed. I look forward to the day when I don't have to go around to the back door anymore. I will not have to be subjected to the humiliations and embarrassments of being called a boy, or why I can't go into the zoo because my face is black. They can kick us out, but they can't kick us down. They can burn the [unsure: (0:11:12)] down but where this one stood and greater [unsure: (0:11:14)] will stand. Because our cause is a righteous cause, and you can slow it down, but you can't stop it. You can cause it to take a more devious route, and get off that straight path, but you can't stop it. It's going. Because the Negroes have a dream. A dream of being an American citizen. Larry Rubin: Our main job was to go from shack to shack and talk to people. We would talk about the importance of registering to vote. With the vote, Negroes for the first time since reconstruction could have a voice in how their government was run. We talked about their rights under federal law, about the fact that people both white and Negro all over the country were supporting them. We invited them to the weekly mass meetings. We explained to them how Negroes were getting together in nearby Albany, and how conditions were getting better there. Every Sunday, all SNCC workers would go to the various churches in the counties. We worshiped, we met knew people, and if the minister was friendly and invited us to talk, we spoke about a New South and about voter registration. Also, in the past, reports about police brutality, lynchings, and discrimination were suppressed by local authorities, but now, whenever incidents occurred, we got the story to the national press. We contacted the Justice department and the FBI also. We also started literacy classes. But as a white, my main job was to somehow work to break communication barriers that existed between Whites and Negroes for hundreds of years in the South. Most Negroes reacted to me as they had been taught to react to all white men—with a subservient "Yassa, boss." I would talk to them about anything: about the weather, crops, local gossip, religion—anything to gain confidence. Sometimes we had a little transistor tape recorder with us. Some of the children we talked to got a kick out of it. While we were talking to some kids on a farm near Bronwood, Georgia, and making the next tape, the local deputy sheriff was parked outside the house. He arrested us later in the day.

Unidentified man 2: What's—What's your name?

[Landon]: Landon. I've got a sister.

Unidentified man 2: You got a sister?

Unidentified man 3: You've got a sister?

Larry Rubin: You do?

[Landon]: Yeah.

Unidentified man 3: How about that?

Unidentified man 2: Bigger than you are smaller than you?

[Landon]: Small.

Unidentified man 3: She's nice?

[Landon]: Yeah.

Unidentified man 4: She is nice.

Unidentified man 2: Alright.

Unidentified man 4: Don't you [unsure: (0:14:03)]

[Landon]: Uh huh.

Unidentified man 4: That's good. That's my boy. Alright.

Unidentified man 2: Can I get [unsure: (0:14:08)]?

[Landon]: Yeah. [general laughter]

Unidentified man 2: Oh, Oh, Uh Oh! We're getting somewhere, huh?

[Landon]: Yeah.

Unidentified woman 2: Say that's her name, [unsure: (0:14:17)]

[Landon]: That's her name is [unsure: (0:14:19)]

Unidentified woman 2: [inaudible]...has a little girl named Dara [?].

[Landon] And a little girl named [Dara].

Unidentified man 2: [Dara]?

[Landon]: Yeah.

Unidentified woman 2: And his dad's name is Jesse P...[?]

[Landon]: And my dad's name is Jesse P...[?]

Unidentified woman 2: And your mother's name.

[Landon]: [Theresa]?

Larry Rubin: It was hard for me to overcome those characteristics in myself that caused these stereotype reactions in others. I discovered that I had many traits that were particularly white. And I had to had to have a full understanding of these before I could be affective. Traits such as paternalism, or over-reacting and trying to prove that I wasn't like other white men. I had to overcome self-consciousness. I had to develop those traits that were basically human and universal, and give up many traits that I considered part of my individuality, but which only served to alienate myself from the people with whom I worked. All SNCC workers in Southwest Georgia live in homes of local residents. We had very little means of support outside of the food and shelter people gave us. Sometimes we receive small amounts from the main office of SNCC in Atlanta, but houses in the rural areas are so separated from each other, and automobiles are so necessary to our work, that many times we decided between food for ourselves or gasoline. And gas always came first. Sherrod assign John O'Neil, a graduate of Southern Illinois University and myself to work in Lee County. We lived with Mama Dolly, and many times we had to help her pick crops and do the farm work in order to get food for ourselves and help—ends meet. Very close feelings often develop between SNCC workers and those who take them in. Prathia Hall, a field secretary in Terrell County, who had gone home to Philadelphia for several months and was returning, tells her feelings.

Prathia Hall: Today I was able to spend some time in Terrell County, and it was really like a real homecoming. And it's the most wonderful thing that has happened to me two months because you are really my family, and—and this is our struggle together. And so, to know that you are well and that your spirit is high, and—aand that even though your, your bodies may be tired, your spirits aren't—it means an awful lot.

Larry Rubin: Of course, anybody who houses SNCC workers has to live in constant danger. All the houses

that have taken SNCC workers in have been shot at. And there was a shotgun in every room at Mama Dolly's, just in case. One of the most active men in Sumter County was Trim Porter, a day laborer and a deacon at a Sumter County church. He convinced his congregation to open a church for voter registration meetings. One day he came home from fishing and found that his house had burned to the ground. His two little girls had told him that a white man had come and done it. He and the girls were questioned by the local sheriff and by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and by the FBI. These agents said that the two girls had done it.

Unidentified man 5: What's Trim told him?

Unidentified man 6: After he had gone to the store at about a quarter to eleven, upon coming back—he was driving his truck—and another man stopped him, and told his house was on fire. So he sped toward his house and found that the fire had been started, that the house was running, falling down to pieces. And he also found his kids in the ditch. They were scared, they were cold, so he couldn't get anything out of them then. Took them to our friend's home. Well after they had thawed out—you know, got them warm and everything—he, he questioned them. They said that a white man came to the house and told them to go down to the road, and they went down to the road. So this white man came in a blue car. The kids were questioned and everything, by both the GBI and FBI, and the GBI's story is the kids did it. This man—the same man, Mr. Porter, was all spied upon a couple weeks ago, and, as he was driving along the road one day, had two white men in the car drive up—you know, drive beside him, and point that gun from their car to his. You see all this happened before [unsure: (0:19:44)], so, I mean you can put one and one together.

Larry Rubin: Shortly after this happened, and Mr. Porter was staying with a friend, he called us and asked to talk to us. The sheriff had told him that he and Reverend Sherrod would get arrested if they went to another meeting in Sumter. Mr. Porter just wanted us to know he was planning to come to the meeting and hear Sherrod.

Friend of Mr. Porter: Well there's a rumor out that tomorrow night at the meeting in Sumter County that a Mr. Trim Porter, who's a d—eldest deacon at that Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, is to be arrested if he comes to our meeting—Along with me. I received a letter—a telephone call from my mother say that my grandmother is ill. I would have gone Tuesday. My grandmother is near death. Well, if they just hadn't gotten out that rumor, that if I didn't—that if I came to that church then I'd be arrested, I would have gone Tuesday. But since they said that, I'll be prepared to go.

Larry Rubin: When we started work in Lee and Sumter Counties, we received threatening phone calls, our car was followed everywhere we went—sometimes it was with teenage kids and sometimes it was by the Sheriff, and sometime by elderly men with guns. The first thing we did when we moved into a new small town, was just to walk down the main street together, to try to show people that we were operating strictly in the open and not as a secret group like all newspapers had said. The first town that I worked in was Bronwood. It had only one main street. It looked like one of those towns you see in a cowboy movie, with high wooden sidewalks with an awning that stretched from one end of the street to the other. We walked down the street and decided to get a coke from a gas station on the other side. There were three of us. As we walked across the street, a group of men from the gas station were coming towards us. They're the men who are found in every southern gas station: they seem to spend half their lives there. One man tried to shove us to try to provoke a fight. It's later turned out that he was a mayor of the town, and several days later he issued a warrant for our arrest claiming that we trespassed on a corner of the field he owned. He owned most of the fields in the town. He came towards us and told us not to come a station. We politely turned around to go back across the street where another two men stood glaring at us with, with a hatred

that I, I've never seen before. We walked toward them not looking at them because we didn't want to start a fight. We simply walked from the from which we had came. They shouted after us, yelling curses like, "you red S.O.B.s." I—I can't explain what fear is like except it's a hard, tight feeling in the pit of my stomach, and it became a part of life. Wherever we went, we were constantly harassed by the police. In Albany I was picked up twice on suspicion of stealing the car I was driving. It takes several hours for the police to prove for their own satisfaction that the car had not been stolen, but in the meantime, they let you sweat it out, and ask you questions about the next move the voter registration movement will take. In Dawson, in Terrell County, there's a corner where a new stop sign had been put up by the city, but they obviously forgot to take the old one down, so there are two stop signs, one about five feet from the other. If a person working for the movement doesn't stop twice he's likely to be slapped in jail with a fine. One night, the home of Caroline Daniels, a Negro in Dawson, was shot into by whites. Everybody in Dawson knew that she was housing white SNCC workers. Jack Chatfield was standing in the living room and got shot in the arm. He showed me the shirt that he was wearing. The holes were just a fraction of an inch from his chest. Jack had just come to Terrell. In fact, it—this was the first time that he'd ever been in the South, and he had been in Dawson only forty-five minutes when it happened. The police were called to help, but listen to Jack describe their attitude when they drove him and another SNCC worker to the police station for questioning. He also said that the doctor, who, who had been called in to treat them, threatened to kill him if he didn't leave Terrell. Jack Chatfield: [unsure: (0:24:48)] on the night, the night of the shooting, they thought it was my fault. [unsure: (0:24:55)] They stuck Ralph in the prison there. The funny thing was, you know, when, when they stopped us they frisked us for weapons. They didn't care that I'd been shot.

Larry Rubin: Our project is the only one in the Deep South that uses whites. For part of the six months that I worked there, I was the on—White working in the rural counties. This is a very big experiment. Throughout the South, Negroes engaged in the Civil Rights Movement are chastised as communists, but in Southwest Georgia this, this is necessary. All the press does is to indicate that Whites and Negroes are living together. To the Whites with whom I came into contact, this meant something lude, dirty, and filthy. A good example is something a gas station attendant once told me when I told him I was working with the voter registration movement. He, he—his face turned red and he, he glared at me, "ah you're the one that's a—sleeping with the n-niggers." When the movement first moved into Terrell, all the local has to do was to public a—publish a picture of a Negro worker standing beside a White female worker. The next day several churches were bombed. When Reverend Sherrod and two other SNCC workers first came to Southwest Georgia, they intended to begin the voter registration movement in Terrell. It's called "Turbo Terrell" by local residents, and its police authorities had the reputation of being one of the most oppressive; however, Terrell County Negro leaders are very cold to the movement. Most of the Negro ministers would not let SNCC use their churches to hold voter registration meetings. Other leader spread rumors about SNCC workers. Sherrod came to the conclusion that the Negro community of Terrell was not yet ready to be a pilot voter registration project. They had to see successes elsewhere first. So SNCC moved from rural Terrell County to the nearby, relatively larger city of Albany. As a result of anti-segregation demonstrations organized and carried out by the Negro use of Albany, working with SNCC workers, the adult community was moved, and organized the Albany movement, headed by W.G. Anderson, a physician. The movement spread back to the rural areas, and residents organized their own movements in Terrell and Lee Counties. In Lee, a high school student, Charles [Wingfield? (0:27:45)] had been expelled for presenting to school officials several demands for improvements in the schools, and for encouraging people to register. Lee County Negroes organized a

boycott of the schools, keeping your children home and demanding that [Wingfield?] be reinstated and his demands be met. In the midst of this boycott, several residents invited SNCC workers to Lee County.

Unidentified Woman 3: Who's worried about the SNCC workers?

Unidentified Woman: I don't think I have met a more dedicated group since I've been here these thirty years. First thing when they came into Albany and since my husband and I went to the first of several meetings, and I knew then that I was going to fix this thing. I haven't regretted it. Larry Rubin: A group of Lee County teenagers formed a committee and when after school to ask people to register. We helped them with training sessions. Mama Dolly and other elderly women formed their own groups. Canvassing is hard, frustrating work. Many people are simply afraid to let you in. They won't listen. Their boss may have warned them not to. They would close the door in our faces and hope that 'Mr. Charley'—a name for any boss—wouldn't find out that we came. But many would stare out of the cracks between the boards in their walls until we were gone. Once the voter registration movement gained strength in Lee and Terrell, county officials closed the registration offices all but one day each week, and they were open only during hours that most people worked. A lady from Terrell tells what it's like to canvass. She insists that she's not a freedom rider, an outsider—she lives in Terrell.

Woman from Terrell: I've been in here, Terrell. I've been here [unsure: (0:29:4)]. And I've been asking people about freedom. Everybody in Terrell County's afraid to talk about freedom. [unsure: (0:29:51-54)]. I went up to peoples' houses and asked them, you know. They said, you one of them freedom riders. They said, you come here from [unsure: (30:00)]. I said, no. I said I'm not a freedom rider. I said I'm in here trying to do the word of God, trying to work for the Lord. I'm not a free—I, I'm trying to hold up and get freedom for myself. The people in Terrell County need to wake up.

Larry Rubin: Reverend Wells is a minister of several country churches. He preaches voter registration from the pulpit.

Reverend Wells: Something keeps telling me that I won't let go of. It's to get these people down to the polls one-by-one or two-by-two. I will hope the rest is [audio static and voice fades: (0:30:43)] getting these people down today...I know that you can say it's hard, almost impossible, but in the face of [unsure: (0:30:59)] it must be done.

Larry Rubin: But despite violence, and despite isolation from their friends, the people of the Lee County movement have registered many voters. And registering isn't simple: it means facing that white registrar; it means going up to the court house; it means daring to say that it is valid for you to be concerned about your government and how it should be run. It is a first step toward regaining dignity and manhood. The movement in Southwest Georgia is also running Negro candidates for office for the first time since Reconstruction. It has started literacy classes and is beginning to work on a plan whereby county Negroes can pool their meager financial resources. Mass meetings are held in each county each week. Here the people of the counties get together, sing, and share their fears and victories, and learn about registering to vote.

[End of audio]