

At the Funeral of

**MEDGAR
EVERS**



In Jackson, Mississippi



***A Tribute in Tears and
A Thrust for Freedom***

by James E. Jackson

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JAMES E. JACKSON is the Editor of **THE WORKER**, the working people's newspaper which was first established in 1924.

A native of Richmond, Virginia, he has been an active participant in numerous struggles of labor and the Negro people in the South since the early '30's. His writings over the years have made significant contributions to the theory and practice of the struggle for freedom and democracy in the South.

He is the author of **THE SOUTH'S NEW CHALLENGE; THE NEGRO QUESTION IN THE U. S.; THE VIEW FROM HERE; PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNISM; etc.**

Published by

Publisher's New Press, 23 W. 26 st., N.Y. 10, N.Y.

July 1963

Printed in the U.S.A.

Wilkins Speaks, Masses March In Funeral Tribute to Evers

JACKSON MISS. — Over 4,000 of his friends, neighbors and fighters in the cause, had crowded into every available space of the gymnasium-like hall of the Negro Masonic Temple Building on Lynch Street, by 10:15 A.M. for the funeral service for Medgar W. Evers, leader of the Mississippi Negroes' freedom fight who was slain by an assassin's bullet on June 12th. The service had been scheduled for 11:30 A.M., last Saturday.

The steady rustle of thousands of paper fans which were beating vainly against the sweltering heat gave way to the sounds of music as a black-robed choir accompanied by four trumpeters and an electric organ filled the great hall and set the somber mood of the service with the "Requiem" by Fox. On the platform facing the silent and reverent audience of mourners— each one arrayed in his or her "Sunday best" — sat Roy Wilkins, the executive secretary of the NAACP; Dr. Ralph J. Bunche, Under-secretary of the United Nations; Congressman Charles Diggs of Michigan; George Biddle, President of Tougaloo College; Clarence Mitchell, legislative secretary of the NAACP, and several Jackson clergymen.

Seated in the center of the first row in the audience was the widow of the martyred leader, Mrs. Myralie Evers with two of her three children — Darrell Kenyatta, 9, and Rena Denise, 8; Medgar's brother Charles Evers and other members of the family.

To the left of the family group, near the front of the audience, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Rev. Abernathy, Rev. Lawrence and Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker were seated with a full delegation from the Leadership of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Other delegations were present — from CORE, headed by its executive officer James Farmer; from the National Council of Churches; from the veteran's organization, AVC. Some fifty prominent personalities from throughout the country could be iden-

tified in the vast crowd, including Dick Gregory, the celebrated "message comedian." Roy Reuther of the United Automobile Workers; and Daisy Bates, heroine of the Battle of Little Rock.

An associate of Medgar Evers in earlier struggles in Mount Bayou and elsewhere in Mississippi, Dr. T. R. M. Howard, was the first speaker to pay a secular tribute to the foully murdered leader. Dr. Howard opened his remarks with a story of pained apology for his current absence from the Mississippi scene. (He now lives in Chicago). "Several years after the battle of Bull's Run an old veteran walked among the grave stones," Dr. Howard said in his parable, "A young man challenged him: 'How could you have survived such a battle, did you run?' 'Yes, it is true,' the old man replied, 'the only real veterans of this battle are the ones who are buried here.' "

Dr. Howard invoked the Biblical quotation that "without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sins" to serve warning on the minions of the law in Mississippi to stop murdering and torturing its Negro citizens. "For over a hundred years now, we have been turning first one and then the other cheek. Our neck has gotten tired of turning now!", he said to the accompaniment of a great roar of shouted approvals from the mourners, "we aren't going to absorb many more of their blows," he said. Dr. Howard likened Evers to the sainted John Brown and said he would live in history alongside the name of the old martyr of the anti-slavery struggle. He concluded his remarks with a call for 50 thousand Mississippi Negroes to take out memberships in the NAACP in the next 30 days.

Local ministers, the Revs. G. R. Haughton, R. L. T. Smith and G. C. Hunt offered religious eulogies to the fallen hero around the theme that "greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his brother." Their tributes were followed by the introduction of Roy Wilkins by the Rev. Charles A. Jones. Roy Wilkins funeral oration articulated the anger, and the unextinguishable and not to be denied resolve of the 20 million Negro Americans to secure now their full and un-

circumscribed rights. He identified the segregation system and the ruling powers in the nation who have for so long failed to act to end it as the forces behind the madman who fired the assassination shot.

Roy Wilkins declared that:

"The lurking assassin at midnight June 11-12 pulled the trigger, but in all wars the men who do the shooting are trained and indoctrinated and keyed to action.

"The Southern political system put him behind that rifle: the lily-white Southern governments, local and state; the senators, governors, state legislators, mayors, judges, sheriffs, chiefs of police, commissioners, etc. Not content with mere disfranchisement, the office holders have used unbridled political power to fabricate a maze of laws, customs and economic practices which has imprisoned the Negro.

"When at times it appeared that the rest of the nation might penetrate the Kingdom of Color, there were those ready always to beat back the adherents of decency and justice. Speaking of the public school decision of 1954 of the United States Supreme Court, Senator James O. Eastland told a 1955 Senatobia, Miss., audience: 'You are obligated to **DISOBEY** such a Court.'

"In far-away Washington, the Southern system has its outposts in the Congress of the United States and by their deals and maneuvers they helped put the man behind the deadly rifle on Guynes Street this week. The Killer must have felt that he had, if not an immunity, then certainly a protection for whatever he chose to do, no matter how dastardly.

"Today as Americans and their President try to recover from their horror to devise ways to correct the evils now so naked in our national life, these men in Congress abetted by the timorous, the technical and the selfishly ambitious are raising the familiar — and by now sickening — chorus of negations: With surgery required, they talk of ointments and pills. With speed the essence, they cite their rituals of procedure. Man may die and children may be stunted, but the seniority system and the filibuster

rule must remain inviolate.

"The opposition has been reduced to clubs, guns, hoses, dogs, garbage trucks and hog-wire compounds.

Obviously the opposition is nearing bankruptcy. Fresh material is in short supply and strategy is stale and ineffective. Obviously, nothing can stop the drive for freedom. It will not cease here or elsewhere. After a hundred years of waiting and suffering, we are determined, in Baldwin language, "not upon a bigger cage, but upon no cage at all."

"Medgar Evers was the symbol of our victory and of their defeat. Contrary to the view of a Jackson city official, Medgar was more than just an opponent. In life he was a constant threat to the system, particularly in his great voter registration work. In the manner of his death he was the victor over it.

"The bullet that tore away his life four days ago tore away at the system and helped to signal its end.

"They can fiddle and they can throw a few more victims to the lions of repression and persecution, but Rome is burning and a new day is just over yonder."

Wilkins speech concluded the funeral services which lasted less than an hour. Then the great crowd of mourners calmly flowed through the single exit of the big hall onto Lynch Street. There, joined by several thousand other Negroes and some two score of white crusaders against racist persecution, a funeral cortege shaped-up. With his stoic, infinitely brave and undaunted widow in line and alone, a few paces behind the white hearse bearing the remains of Medgar Evers, a vast army of freedom fighter veterans fell in formation, four abreast to wend their way, in a twenty-block-long column throughout the length of Jackson, in a mile and a half silent march.

The march, which began on the street which bears the name of John R. Lynch, the Negro statesman who was Speaker of the House in the Mississippi State Assembly during the Reconstruction years, ended at the Negro business district.

Roy Wilkins and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Dick Gregory and other famous names in the freedom struggle of America's Negroes composed the front ranks of the marchers.

I was there and marched in the front ranks of the contingent of uniformed Elks. The temperature was 103 degrees but I saw no one fall out of ranks in the long walk under a merciless sun.

Only for the occasion of this sacred tribute to the dead, had the Mayor lifted his edict against "Negroes congregating, demonstrating, or indulging in any public manifestations whatsoever." And the terms of this march was that it had to be totally silent, along the specified police-patrolled route, and promptly ended with the crowd dispersed by 2:00 P.M. that day.

But in the aftermath of this moving silent processional, a spontaneous demonstration of revolutionary explosiveness occurred. An event from which the racist police regime of Jackson is not likely to recover. I saw frail-bodied school girls, with blazing honey-brown faces, and with hands bare of weapons charge fearlessly into a phalanx of helmeted police with raised riot-guns. I saw Angels storming into the defenders of the bastions of Hell, Mississippi, that is.

The View From Here:

Commentaries on
Peace and Freedom

by JAMES E. JACKSON

\$1.95 paperback ——— \$4.95 cloth cover



II.

Brave Youths Defy Police Guns, Dogs and Mississippi Jails

BETWEEN NOON and 2 p.m. Saturday, June 15, the city of Jackson, Miss., had fairly come to a standstill. For a fourth of the Negro population, in serried ranks that stretched out for 20 blocks, was marching through Jackson behind the white hearse that bore the bullet-punctured body of their beloved leader — Medgar W. Evers, the NAACP field secretary for Mississippi slain by an assassin's bullet in the early morning hours of June 12.

All business establishments along the route of march were closed or shuttered. All cross-traffic had come to a stop. As the silent cortege moved through the "white" part of town in measured step, I watched, as I walked, the faces of the white citizens who sat in their cars at the intersections, who formed clusters in the windows of stores and dwellings on either side of the concrete-surfaced street along which we marched, or who gathered in little clusters at the corners and in front of taverns.

Now and then one could hear the nervous but mirthless giggling of some young women on-lookers. Passing a tavern the raucus blare of a juke box rock-and-roll recording cut into the reverent stillness of the scene.

THEIR FACES

But for the most part, the faces I saw bore a grim and troubled countenance. One could identify the expressions of fear, of hate, of bewilderment and startled disbelief. Also, I could see etched in the faces of some, lines of compassion and sorrow, and there were heads inclined downward at an angle of shame and embarrassment. The white on-lookers for the most part were as silent and apparently reflective as were the close-ranked columns of Negro marchers.

Nor were the Negroes marching alone. For integrated in their ranks was a small representation, a score or more of those millions of white Americans who are increasingly coming to see their own identity with the Negro's struggle for justice.

The mayor had imposed brutal conditions for the funeral procession. Among the stipulations was one prohibiting any singing or shouting of slogans. Two blocks from the terminal point of the mile and a half pre-

cessional, subdued voices began to raise a song in protest which rolled gently along the whole length of the marching column.

It was the modern version of the old spiritual from the days of slavery — “We Shall Overcome, Some Day.” The steel-helmeted, jack-booted police, with their heavy pistols slung low on their hips, pounded their clubs in their hands and shifted nervously from foot to foot but made no move to interfere. After all, the march had reached its end, the 2:00 witching hour was only minutes away and the “off the streets” curfew would soon be back in force.

END OF MARCH

The funeral march was over. Thousands of mourners milled about the Collins Funeral Home on North Farish street which held the remains of Medgar Evers, Somehow there was comfort in the con-fraternity of the crowd of one's friends, colleagues, kinsmen.

No one was in a mood to rush away to the chores of a Saturday evening household. Especially when one carries within oneself the iron weight of knowledge that “the law” commands that you, a Negro, must get off of the streets and into your own house.

Then it was that I heard it. The soft soprano voice rising above the sounds of the throng, caroling the words to the tune that has become a kind of anthem of the freedom marchers. "Oh Freedom; Oh, Oh Freedom! Before I be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave. . . ."

The song was coming from the half-opened mouth of a little slip of a girl maybe five feet tall but not quite a hundred pounds, whose skin had the soft-brown color of honey; whose eyes now flashed wide and brown pupiled, then closed tight in the prayerful ecstasy of the resolution of the words of her song. She kept the beat of her song by patting the fingers of one hand into the palm of the other.

The people opened a circle of space for her. And into the circle came first one then another young woman of her own late 'teen or early 20's age group.

THE SONG RISES

As the volume of song rose, the circle enlarged and in the circle had now come several young men to join the chorus.

Those in the outer ring of the circle were now joining in the singing and vigorously clapping out the beat. Soon the singing crowd had fully covered the street from sidewalk to sidewalk.

Hundreds of voices were now raised full and loud in the familiar freedom songs and the little slip of a girl was the mover and shaker of them all. She never gave a verbal command but she converted that crowd into a well disciplined chorus, commanding them through the gestures of a master-pantomimist: a roll of the eye, a pout of the lips, a smile, a shrug of the shoulders, an exaggerated pat of the foot.

Suddenly she raised both hands aloft, and the crowd now hundreds deep, fell instantly silent. She cocked her head to the side, rolled her eyes toward her colleagues and with a half-secretive but all-knowing smile, began a new song.

The words I heard were: "This little light of mine, it is going to shine; oh, it is going to shine."

A roar of identifying applause came from the crowd and a thousand voices joined in the chorus of "This little light of mine. . . ." The verses were improvised by volunteer soloists taking the initiative in rounds, and all came in on the chorus.

ACCUSATION

At this point a police car bearing the Chief, himself, edged into the crowd who opened a passageway. The young people who constituted the inner-ring

of the crowd pointed their fingers like so many searchlights at the police as they fairly shouted their verses which called for freedom and the clean-out of segregation.

Someone ad libbed a verse that said "we want the killers of Evers" and the little girl in the center of the ring gracefully arched her thin arm and pointing finger in the direction of Capital street. Capital street crosses Farish at the top of rise.

It demarcates the division between the two worlds, it separates the "colored" part of town from the "white." There at the crest of the knoll where Farish street climbs up to Capital was the phalanx of the blue steel-helmeted police with riot-guns at the ready.

The rhythmic pace of "This little light of mine" beat faster and firmer. Now hundreds of arching arms pointed to the police at the top of the incline cue.

A voice in the crowd said: "What are we waiting for?"

And the little slip of a girl answered back: "Well, all right, then!" She made a half turn and stepped toward the top of the hill, with a kind of dance step that was neither walking nor running.

GARBAGE TRUCK

I saw a middle-aged woman belabored by a club-wielding policeman until she fell unconscious to the ground. He then grabbed her by the hair and dragged her to the nearest garbage truck where he hoisted her to his shoulders and dumped her in as though he were handling a sack of potatoes.

I saw the wife of a paraplegic veteran of the Korean War beaten to the ground, then battered by the clubs of three policemen before being bodily lifted and thrown into a garbage truck. Her only offense had been that she had not pushed her wheel-chair-ridden husband fast enough in the direction that the police had demanded.

The Negro demonstrators retreated before the wild charge of the police who were cursing like maniacs and letting out frenzied Confederate army "Rebel yells."

The dogs arrived and were given full freedom of the length of their leashes. One opened a long gash on the leg of a woman whose dress had been already half-torn from her body and who was leaning peaceful coexistence between against a door sill, trying to

upon her.

BOMBARDMENT

A distance of several yards had opened between the police phalanx and the demonstrators when, from the roofs and the sides of the buildings came volley after volley of "Coke" bottles and rocks which shattered on the pavement, or caromed off of the steel helmets of the police barbarians. Some dropped their rifles as they fled for cover. Others cursed and some screamed in pain.

But now, from the bottom of Farish street came a second phalanx of police. The demonstrators retreated into nearby houses and some stores and blended into the sidewalk crowds.

The police grappled with, and beat, and dragged scores of people off the porches, out of windows, off of the sidewalks, until the garbage trucks had their cargoes, and the canvass-covered army transport vehicles were crowded.

The heroic demonstrators were transported to the newly improvised concentration camp which has been pressed into service; the jails have been long-since filled with the victims of the rampant racist reign of terror

EIGHT ABREAST

The other young men and girls in the crowd formed an eight-abreast line behind her, and, before you could sing out, "This little light of mine," there were some 600 youth and grown people and old people marching toward the top of the hill, and the shouted chant of "FREEDOM! FREEDOM!" filled the canyon of Farish street.

As the singing and chanting crowd, with that daring youth guard in its van, approached the line of police, a squad of six motorcycles raced down the hill into the crowd. But the surging mass of demonstrators never broke their pace, they opened channels for the motorcycles and kept forging ahead.

I could hear the screams of the sirens, and the frantic clang of fire-engine bells. Canvass covered army transports roared into view.

They were followed by the tinny clatter of the garbage trucks which Jackson's police use as an inventive piece of cruelty to haul demonstrators to the concentration camp-style prison.

With the first ranks of the demonstrators only a half block from the crest of the hill, the police, now reenforced by 200

State Troopers, charged down upon them, indiscriminately battering and slashing the front ranks with the butts of their rifle and sub-machine guns. Along the sidewalks came two columns of police with drawn pistols and flaying clubs.

CATTLE PENS

I saw this concentration camp at Jackson. The hundreds of Negro youth and white adults, men and women, are kept in the corrugated quonset exhibition pens used to house livestock during state and county fairs.

The sun, beating down on the metal buildings, builds up an oven-like temperature inside. The only toilet facilities are slit trenches which accommodated the needs of the cattle. There are two hose pipes, to provide all the water for any purpose, accessible to the prisoners who now number over 900, the youngest being less than eight years old.

Each quonset building is surrounded by barbed "pig wire."

One wouldn't know that such barbarities are going on at the Fair Grounds, for at a distance the eye is drawn to a huge carousel-like building with candy stripe painted surface and rolling tre-terraced grounds.

The radio reported that only 27 people were "officially" ar-

rested on this day; the others were detained without charges, then released. Another 17 were admitted for hospitalization for gaping wounds and internal injuries sustained from police weapons.

III.

The Challenge of A Fortress of Segregation: What Is To Be Done?

SATURDAY, JUNE the 15, was a day in Jackson Miss., that began in sorrow and mourning for the martyr, Medgar Evers, but it ended on a note of triumph. For in Jackson in the afternoon of Saturday, a demonstration of explosive expressiveness occurred on North Faris street near Capital, a tableau of poetic courage and a glorious manifestation of the unconquerable will of the Negro masses of the southland to gain the freedom goals for which Medgar Evers and so many other have given their lives.

I saw a great crowd of kinsmen charge into the solid ranks of steel-helmeted police gunmen with clenched fists upraised and defiant shouts of "Freedom NOW" roaring from their throats. I saw our glorious youth in the front ranks of the suffering demonstrators with that nameless Saint Joan in the lead. I saw a people manifest their wil

to secure their rights now, no matter the costs, no matter the odds, no matter the sacrifice. I saw a people in massed struggle who had come to a concensus that life cannot be lived any longer in the old ways. I saw a people's rising for freedom, a people who have lost their fear.



TO EXPERIENCE such a day as this, in Jaskson, Mississippi, is to know in all of its dimensions, what the mortally wounded beast of the old order has determinedly resolved. That is, that Jackson in particular, and Mississippi in general are first among the chosen places in the South, where the forces of white supremacy and the incorrigible profiteers in Negro oppression and deprivation, have fortified themselves for a desperate last stand against the mighty popular offensive for the desegregation and democratization of the South.

There are other place-names in the South whose infamy is associated with the fact that they are garrison cities in the grip of lost battalions of the historically beaten legions of the white supremacists.

Hard fisted cliques of racist politicians rely upon the clubs and guns of utterly de-classed and de-humanized bands of po-

lice mobsters to beat back the inexorable tides of social change in such cities as Gadsden, Alabama; Danville, Virginia; and Albany, Georgia. While in such states as Alabama and Mississippi, the power remains still in the hands of such blatant Negro-haters and fascist-minded ultra-reactionaries as a George Wallace and a Ross Barnett.

THESE DIE-HARD bastions of Rebel resistance to the laws of the land, the rights of the Negro people, and the will of the nation, such as Jackson, Mississippi pose a special challenge and problem to the vital new crusade for Negro freedom which is abroad in our land.

The general offensive for freedom and equality on the part of the Negro masses of the South began in earnest with the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott in 1957.

Since then the movement of direct mass action has continued to develop with irresistible force. Great struggles have been waged in Little Rock, Nashville, Tuscaloosa, Oxford, Albany, Birmingham, Atlanta, Greensboro, Gadsden, Jackson, Cambridge and a number of other cities.

These struggles have engaged hundreds of thousands of Negroes and numerous white supporters in direct assaults upon

various features of the segregation system in the South.

IN THESE BATTLES the NAACP, SCLC, CORE, SNCC and a number of local organizations have provided organizational channels and leadership for this general uprising of the Negro masses against all manner of slavery-like restrictions which the brutal system imposes.

Under the inspiration and pressure of the masses, old leaders have gained new militancy and dedication and numerous creative and talented new leaders have come to the front ranks of the masses in the heat of battle.

The heroic mass struggles of the Negro people have a profound impact upon our nation. The President has been compelled to heed their proclamation and has responded with a vigorous message to Congress calling for the urgent enactment of a Civil Rights Act of 1963 designed to legally secure to the Negro people the full measure of their citizenship rights and to outlaw segregation and discrimination patterns in the life of the nation.

This is expressive of the tide of our times.

But the willful defenders of segregation and Negro oppression have taken up positions of defiance and bloody resistance in such fortresses of white suprem-

acy as Jackson, Miss.

TO OCCUPY these fortresses, to bring down the ramparts of these racist strong-points will require a well coordinated combined attack in which all the popular organizations of freedom-loving Americans must take part.

Would it not be a good thing to convene a national consultation of all the heads of participating organizations in the Negro peoples freedom struggle, to elaborate a common battle plan for launching a combined operation for reducing the last remaining bastions of bigotry in the South — such as is represented by Jackson, Miss.?

It will be necessary in such a place as Jackson, Miss., to sever the police arm from the ruling body of racist reactionaries who are defying the Federal authority and it will be necessary to organize the defense of the lives and liberties of the protesting victims of racism with the aid and full authority of the Federal police power.

It may be necessary to supplement the economic boycott and mass public protest demonstrations with a version of an economic general strike: and extended work-holiday on the part of the Negro toilers and their

white supporters until substantial steps are taken to break the segregation chains.

AN INTENSIVE campaign of explanation, of missionary canvassing among the white youth, trade unionists, church people, teachers and professionals will need to be carried through in conformation with a general plan which would draw on the new commitments of the National Council of Churches, the United Auto Workers, and other national organizations who have expressed their resolve to join in the crusade to bring the civil rights revolution to a speedy victory.

Furthermore, in addition to pressure being kept upon the government to enforce and secure the right of Negro citizens, the Attorney General must be prevailed upon to take legal initiatives to bring such enemies of the nation as Ross Barnett, Governor George Wallace and Al Lingo before the bar of justice and to prosecute such racist organizations as the KKK and the White Citizens Councils. James O. Eastland's occupancy of a seat in the U. S. Senate should be challenged.

BUT IN ADDITION to these measures, the influence of the Government should be brought

into play to cause the location of new mass-employment plants in such cities as Jackson, Miss., and Cambridge, Maryland, and Danville, Virginia. Such new factories would be under the obligation of the federal government to employ Negroes in all job classifications on a strictly non-segregated and non-discriminatory basis.

Both the new pattern in the working force of such plants and in the life of the union in them, would be consciously ordered to serve as models and illustrations of the advantages of a non-discriminatory way of life which could benefit mutually all Southern workers — Negro and white.

In any event, the bastions of bigotry, the cesspools of segregation and anti-Negro violence, such as Jackson, Miss., must and will be cleared away. The Negro people demand it, the national interest requires it, and the forces are strong enough and in line to bring it about .

WHAT DO YOU READ?

Follow the living documentary of our times in the pages of the foremost American working people's newspaper — **THE WORKER.**

————— *Subscribe to* —————

THE WORKER (Twice a week)

23 West 26th Street

New York 10, N. Y.

1 year—\$7.00