

# Special CORElator Supplement IN COMMEMORATION OF WILLIAM MOORE

## Desegregation of a Theater —and My First Walk

by William Moore

(Editor's Note: This is probably William Moore's last article. He sent it to me from Baltimore shortly before he left on his ill-fated walk across the deep south. He had written considerably in his lifetime and had had one book published, "The Mind in Chains.")

### A MAILMAN'S LAST DELIVERY

William Moore was a 35-year-old mailman, married and with three children. His final mail delivery will become a landmark in the history of the U.S. civil rights struggle, though he never got the letter to its destinee. He was unable to complete the delivery because he was murdered—shot in the back—at night on an Alabama highway April 23, 1963.

The delivery was not a commonplace one and in fact was not for the U.S. post office. Moore was on vacation and devoting his free time to delivering a letter might be termed a busman's holiday, except for the fact that it was not a holiday in any sense of the word.

He had decided to spend his vacation delivering, personally, a letter to Governor Ross Barnett of Mississippi pleading for greater understanding on the question of racial justice. He resolved to start at Chattanooga, Tennessee and to walk all the way—400 miles—to Jackson, Mississippi. Tennessee was the state of his birth and Mississippi is where he spent his youth until his family moved north to Binghamton, New York. He was a white southerner who abhorred bigotry. He had been an ardent advocate of brotherhood and world peace since his teen-age years.

The two placards which he chose to carry on his one-man Freedom Walk said: "Equal Rights for All (Mississippi or Bust)" and "Black and White Eat at Joe's." The word "black" had been ripped away when his dead body was found on the Alabama roadside.

Prior to starting the walk, he wrote President Kennedy: "I am not making this walk to demonstrate either federal rights or state rights, but individual rights. I am doing it, among other things, I feel, for the south and hopefully to illustrate that the most basic of freedoms of peaceful protest is not altogether extinguished down there."

Last fall, Moore moved from Binghamton to Baltimore, partly to become more deeply involved in the civil rights struggle. He participated in a number of Baltimore CORE actions including Freedom Rides on U.S. Route 40. Just before leaving Binghamton, he helped organize picketing of the local Howard Johnson's on the day designated by CORE for nationwide demonstrations urging desegregation of the company's southern restaurants.



William Moore is the first CORE member to die in nonviolent action.

Exactly 413 persons were arrested in 6 days in the campaign to desegregate the Northwood Theater. I was one of them. The theater is located in a white, middle-class neighborhood with a Negro college—Morgan—only a few blocks away. For eight years, students at this college had demonstrated periodically against this conveniently located movie which refused to admit them.

On February 15, 26 students attempted to enter the lobby and were stopped by the manager. The state trespass act was read and they were arrested. Next day, continuous picketing began and mass arrests occurred nightly. Bail was set at \$100 and some students would get out of jail only to be rearrested.

A couple of days later, I happened to pass by, entered the lobby and saw 25 students standing peacefully near the ticket booth. The manager suddenly appeared and started to read the trespass act. Not a student moved. I was no less willing than they were to sacrifice for human rights. So, I decided to stand with them.

A police officer asked each student: "Do you understand that if you do not leave you will be arrested?" When he reached me at the end of the line he repeated the question. Even before we were placed under arrest more students entered the lobby. That night police arrested 150 Negroes and one white—myself. My bail was set at \$200. The Negroes were packed two and three to a cell. I had a private cell with a board for a bed. Next morning, the Baltimore CORE group bailed me out, though the campaign at this particular theater was not a CORE-sponsored project.

Picketing spread from the theater to the police station and city hall. Neighborhood residents and college professors joined the picket line at the theater. White students from Johns Hopkins University and Goucher College joined Negro students of Morgan College in picketing. For

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## FREEDOM MARCHERS RESUME MOORE'S WALK

Starting at the identical spot in Chattanooga where William Moore set out on his ill-fated Freedom Walk, ten members of CORE and SNCC, including CORE Assistant National Director Richard Haley, tried to complete the walk to Jackson.

This photo shows them approaching the Alabama state line on May 3. Leading the walkers and bearing placards identical to those carried by Moore, is Sam Shirah, a white native of Alabama.

Behind the walkers, is a gang of white teen-agers who, on occasion pelted them with rocks and eggs. During the lunch stop that day, Winston Lockett was hit hard in the neck and fell to the ground. As the walkers prepared to proceed, Robert Gore was struck in the head by a flying rock.

At the Alabama border, the group was blocked by a contingent of state troopers directed by Alfred Lingo, state commissioner of public safety. First, Lingo over a loudspeaker, ordered the walkers to disperse. When they refused, he had them arrested.

Police used long electric prod poles in arresting three of the walkers who laid down on the road and decided to non-cooperate. Newspaper reporters who had been following the walkers were halted at the state line.

Meanwhile, from a mob of whites assembled in a nearby field came shouts of "Get the goddam communists!" "Throw them niggers in the river!" One woman kept yelling: "Kill 'em." "Kill 'em."

The arrests were not entirely unexpected. Eight others who had started from Birmingham to join the Freedom Walk had been seized in Attala two days earlier and Alabama officials had announced this as their policy in the situation.

The walkers decided to remain jailed-in and a hearing in circuit court was set for June 3. They were imprisoned at Fort Payne until a group of CORE members from vari-

### GROUP IN MOORE'S HONOR

At a meeting in Binghamton, N.Y., on June 5 addressed by Jim Peck, some 60 persons voted to form a CORE group in honor of William Moore. The new group will succeed the William Moore Committee for Human Rights which was set up by Binghamton residents shortly after the murder.



ous parts of the country assembled for a protest vigil at the jail. The jailed walkers were then transferred to Gadsden but on the first day of the protest vigil there, they were transferred to Kilby State Prison in Montgomery. Eric Weinberger went on a hunger strike and finally was forced. He lost 30 pounds.

Eleven of the vigilers decided to try to complete Moore's walk. They started on May 19 immediately following a memorial service at the murder site.

As soon as Jim Peck, editor of the CORElator and a personal friend of

Moore's, had concluded the service by laying a wreath at the spot of the assassination, the 11 walkers donned their placards and started to walk. Before they had proceeded two steps, they were arrested by state troopers who had been scrutinizing the memorial service and on occasion harassing a number of the 125 persons attending. Ten of the walkers were tried and received suspended sentences. One is still to be tried as this CORElator goes to press. The ten arrested May 3 were tried June 3 after being jailed-in for a month. They were fined \$200 and the case is being appealed.

### DESEGREGATION OF A THEATER *continued*

two more nights, the arrests continued. Then on February 21, the owner decided to desegregate the theater and the pickets gleefully tore-up their placards. Those still in jail were released without bail.

Next day, I decided to follow-through this victory by walking to the state capital in Annapolis—a distance of about 35 miles—and deliver a letter to Governor Tawes. I would wear two placards: one saying "End Segregation in Maryland," the other "Equal Rights for All Men." I was unable to deliver my letter to the governor, personally, because he was out, sick. However, I had a long talk with one of his assistants and spoke

with leaders of the state assembly. My own state assemblyman, Joe O'Connell, bought me dinner and drove me back to Baltimore.

Perhaps it was this walk which gave me the idea for my forthcoming walk in the south. When I wrote my friend, Jim Peck, about the southern walk, he replied that possibly this would be more effective as a group action and that, furthermore, it would be extremely dangerous for a lone individual. However, I had made up my mind. I felt that a white mailman, born in the south, delivering a letter to Governor Barnett, would have a certain impact. I definitely plan to take this walk during my vacation.