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Book Review: The Trouble I've Seen: White Journalist/Black Movement

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Books

The Trouble I've Seen: White Journalist/Black Movement

by Paul Good
Howard University Press
272 pp., \$9.95

Reviewed by Judith S. Andrews

For the complacent who thought the issues of the civil rights movement had been resolved and catalogued for future reference, *The Trouble I've Seen* could prove unsettling. Paul Good maintains that the questions raised by the movement have never honestly been dealt with and that real progress for Black people is yet to come.

In essence, Good has resurrected a year—1964—of the movement; a year which he sees as the most significant in determining the flow of events in the ensuing years of the movement. In his view, "After 1964, the South and the rest of the country would never be the same. And though, the year hung for only a moment in our history, the agonies and glories of 1964 were long ago locked in the national seed . . . This book is concerned with how America was revealed to me in that year of bitter bloom."

The author, a former newscaster for ABC-TV, tells his story by focusing on the main events of 1964—the campaign in St. Augustine, Fla.; the murders of Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, and Mickey Schwerner in Mississippi; and the formation of the Mississippi Freedom Party. He is particularly effective in his discussion of the young people of the movement—the thousands who flocked to Southern rural towns that summer to spearhead the drive toward racial justice.

He writes: "More and more focus was placed on the personal aspects of the volunteers until an image developed of the average boy volunteer being bearded, smelly, and probably Jewish."

and the average girl, a lank-haired, flat-chested neurotic horror who, with a folk song on her lips, jumped from one colored boy's bed to another."

While the author deplored the fact that many people put-down the motley volunteers because of superficialities, he too had some problems with their unabashed attitude of omniscience. Yet, he says that the prime-movers of the movement had to be the young, "because only youth could take the absolute chances Mississippi demanded."

Interlaced with Good's detailed chronicle of 1964 are some perceptive impressions from a white man about the white American psyche on race. In his continual effort to purge his own mind of racial prejudice, he seems to see more clearly the irony of racial attitudes in this country. As an example, the author cites a chilling statement by a Ku Klux Klansman about the 1964 bombing of a church in Birmingham, Ala., where four little girls were killed.

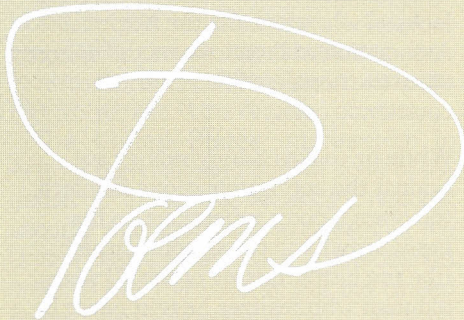
The Klansman told his audience, "... they weren't children. Children are little people, little human beings, and that means white people. There's little dogs and cats and apes and baboons and skunks and there's also little niggers. But they ain't children . . . and if there's four less niggers tonight, then I say, good for whoever planted the bomb. We're all better off."

Also, much of Good's book is devoted to the discussion of white journalistic attitudes on the coverage of racial stories. He calls this the "White Father Knows Best" assumption. Having worked for both ABC and CBS television network, and for newspapers and magazines as a free-lance writer, Good says that he is well-qualified to say that the common denominator of American journalism is white middle

to upper-classness. "I agree with Jesse Jackson when he calls the National Association of Broadcasters the epitome of institutionalized racism in this country."

While he makes a convincing case against the communications industry, too often Good's reflections on his past journalistic career sound much like the bitter musing of the 40 year-old man who realizes he will never be president of the company. He states that his intent is not to sound like a martyr, but ultimately his memories of his career experiences seem unduly self-conscious. For example, he mentions an article he wrote on the assassination of Martin Luther King for *Atlantic Monthly*, which was sent back to him because the editors felt it lacked eloquence. He then takes this opportunity to reproduce certain parts of the article as though to prove his writing skill. These moments when he seems compelled to prove points bog down the natural flow of the book.

However, Good's investigative skills are unquestionable. His attention to detail is meticulous as is his analysis of why this country has been and still is plagued by the race question. Often seeming almost an innocent in a foreign land when he describes his travels through the South in the Sixties, it's almost sad in the end to have the pervasive reality of racism strike down another idealist. □



No Peace

Life has no peace
somedays
Like the twisting, winding, dark waters
that
Crash across the river bed
echoing and reechoing
their discontent

Life has no peace
somedays
Only a moment in the sun
like the dark waters
to shimmer and
be quiet
To soothe the spirit
To calm the soul

Somedays, there's no peace
Only a search
for misery's end
for creativity's urge

Like the wild and rushing dark
waters
Uncontrollable
A futile struggle for escape
Life is meaningless –
somedays

And what's more – There's no peace
Edelin Coleman Fields
Hyattsville, Md.

Sunset by the Bay

A mass splash of golden rays
boldly intermingled with red, purple,
green, and blue
appear over the water's edge.
The waves shimmer in the magic.
Farther at a distance, a freighter carrying
cargo,
moves with ease out to sea.
The varied splendedored colors pause
on the Bay.
Then suddenly the magnificent
panorama is gone;
night softly steals the show.
A sea gull's piercing call nearby
breaks the spell,
and the tide moves in and laps upon
the shore.
Hand in hand we watch the passing
scene.

Lillie Draper Taylor
Howard University

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