

Klansmen's Convictions Evoke Mixed Reactions

MERIDIAN, Miss. - (NPI)--The conviction of seven Klansmen on conspiracy charges left mixed feelings among civil rights leaders, who were both elated by the prospect of a "new era" of interracial justice and disappointed in the weak action taken.

On the one hand, it was noted that the convictions, in the U.S. District Court, represented the first time anyone had ever been punished in Mississippi civil rights slayings.

Even though only seven of 18 accused men were convicted of taking part in the killing of three civil rights workers, the trial afforded an opportunity to expose Klan operations in Mississippi.

FURTHERMORE, the trial provided white Mississippians one of their first chances to express support of interracial justice without fear of Klan reprisal.

Newspapers all over the state praised the verdict--something that would have been unheard of only a few years ago.

On the other hand, it was pointed out that the seven Klansmen were convicted in federal court only after state courts failed to act.

Rather than indicating any "new era of interracial justice," the trial demonstrated that the killing of black people and civil rights workers continued to be no crime in state courts, it was argued.

It was also noted that the seven Klansmen face a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment in a triple murder. As one Negro newspaper asserted, "nowhere else but in Mississippi would persons convicted in murder go free after a few years."

Critics of the trial also charged that two convicted Klansmen were jailed by U.S. District Court Judge Harold Cox only after they made injudicious remarks.

Judge Cox made angry statements against threatening the court, but nothing was said against the crimes of which the Klansmen were accused: taking part in the 1964 slaying of civil rights workers Michael Schwerner, 24, and Andrew Goodman, 20, both white New Yorkers, and James Chaney, 22, a Negro from Meridian.

Supreme Court To Hear Georgia Dismissed Case

WASHINGTON - (NPI)--The same Reconstruction-era law used to convict seven Klansmen in the slaying of three civil rights workers in Mississippi may be used against four white men accused of beating three Negroes who ate at a Georgia truck stop.

The Klansmen were convicted under a federal "criminal conspiracy" provision of the 1870 Civil Rights Act, after state courts failed to take action in the civil rights killings.

The same conspiracy provision could be used against those accused of severely beating black people who ate at a Braselton (Ga.) eatery.

The U.S. Supreme Court, which will hear the case, will determine whether the 1870 law can be used against persons other than the owner of a public establishment.

Thurgood Marshall, who prepared the government's case as U.S. solicitor general, will not take part in deliberations on the issue, as he is now a Supreme Court Justice.

The case went to the high court after a U.S. District judge in Atlanta dismissed it.

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