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Citadel of the Citizens Council

While other Southern states move toward at least token desegregation, in Mississippi the diehard white-supremacists are firmly in control.

By HODDING CARTER III

GREENVILLE, Miss.

THE roll-call of Southern communities which have begun at least token public-school integration in response to Federal court orders is being significantly lengthened this fall with the peaceful desegregation of schools in Dallas, Memphis, and Atlanta. In the last two cities, massive resistance on the part of the white school authorities was mounted in Deep South was shunted for the first time. Until the federal courts intervened, the psychological effect on the rest of the Black Belt South was negligible.

But one state, which shares with Arkansas and South Carolina a distinction of maintaining total segregation at all levels, has shown no signs of yielding to a process of resistance rather than crumble. The state is Mississippi. After seven years of mounting pressure, it is virtually impossible to find any public manifestations of the facsimile many whites are privately expressing.

As the pressure has intensified, in fact, Mississippi resistance has tended to stiffen rather than crumble. It is true the Southern state has shown a completely unified front in defying the recent Interstate Commerce Commission order on the desegregation of interstate facilities. State laws were invoked in every city to preserve segregation in the local waiting rooms and terminal restaurants, and although the Justice Department promptly asked Federal courts for a restraining order, there was little doubt this order will be maintained until the last legal maneuver is exhausted.

The observer would be hard pressed to find a major civil rights organization that is not operational. There is a handful of white dissidents, but there is a genuine number of blacks who have had no part in the movement, but neither is formed into a strength that can influence greatly. Support of the movement for the continuation of segregation in Mississippi is pervasive, sometimes subtle, and in others strongly high degree it is vested in the Citizens Council.

It is difficult to explain to an outsider just how powerful a force this white-supremacy group has become. Perhaps the brightest point of group is that the Citizens Council in Mississippi is not only a major civil rights organization, but a versatile political body, which makes heavy use of newspaper advertising. One Council advertisement that prospective member need merely "walk into the back." In another town, a membership application could be filled out at the local hotel. In countless restaurants across the state, Citizens Council literature can be picked up with the toothpicks at the cashier's counter.

The local organization's president is invariably a prominent citizen, and the board of directors is drawn largely from the community's Who's Who. When meetings are held, which isn't often, the same rough form of Baptist—say, the chairman begins calls "pardon me, Mr. — often a Baptist—for a prayer. Committees report, if any, are heard, and the business of the evening follows.

As often as not, the meeting will be open to the public, and will feature a main speaker and several lesser lights. The featured attraction is its virtually unbroken adherence to segregation and state's rights, which the Supreme Court, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, church groups, "moderates," and "hustlers" from the rest of the white community and the complete destruction of interracial communities and social clubs. It is the most productive and far easier to accommodate.

To a degree which is hard to convey to someone who does not live in Mississippi, the Citizens Council has managed to divert the enmity of most white Mississippians for integration into a mold which includes the total rejection of any deviation from the status quo. Blind adherence to "our way of life" is the reem of the Citizens Council's...
In the same county, the woman caller of a weekly newsletter has battled the Council since the day it was organized. When a whispering campaign and advertising boycott failed to drive her out of line, a group of Citizens Council leaders started another newspaper to cover the story. She has managed to survive, thanks to almost a direct appeal to her own gentle determination that will not yield, but against the front was made and ready for it by other newspaper men who were, of course, Council leaders. The primary technique of isolation is simply a variation of the big lie. Those who do not go along with the Council are tarred and feathered and driven to the wall.

In fact, the moment it was clear the Freedom Riders were coming to Mississippi after their violence-punctuated journey out of Alabama, the Council took the lead in urging public order, and such people as the freedom fighters poured out a steady stream of vilification upon the organizations and individuals connected with the group. As each new busload arrived in Jackson, the Council membership efforts intensified and, if its leaders are to be believed, the spirit of the city went with them.

The same was true in north Mississippi after Negro registration attempts resulted in a steady climate of opinion, they begin to stir, and the old fear of the pariah returns.

Lately, a new weapon has been added to the Council's arsenal. Propaganda against Communists have been brought into the state, usually by American Communist organizations, and while they deal in charges that have never been substantiated, they challenge the segregationist system as an alien force. This, too, has been effective in reducing its mass support, especially in counties where Mississippians are less likely to be aware of a clash between the Council and their fellow Americans.

Today, after Memphis and Atlanta and Dallas, the Council in strong, usually under the leadership of Creekup, is going stronger in Mississippi. Paradoxically, it has been reinvigorated as the tissue has cut off sources to the state. And certain events which, because of their nature, will lead in the long run to the destruction of the state, the Council supports, have had the effect of giving

the Council an immediate shot in the arm.

In the past six months, Mississippi's councils have been exposed for the first time at all, voter registration drives, Freedom Riders, Federal court orders and action court for the desegregation of the state university. The Council has hastened to capitalize on each.

Nothing, however, has been as much of a godsend to the Council as the continued freedom of the Freedom Riders. Even while their exploits were focusing national attention on segregation in interstate facilities in the South, Council leaders were singing out the "frightening riders" as a constitutional pernicious example of "our inexorable interference." The success with which officials of the capital city of Jackson kept the segregation lid on while maintaining law and order as hundreds of Freedom Riders poured into the city was made-to-order propaganda for the Council, which has always promised that segregation could be preserved without violence.

The Council is infinitely stronger in Mississippi than the fact that the state is still basically agrarian, made up of small communities and towns in which the dissenter can find few allies. There is no regionalism in Mississippi, no challenge to the segregationist system as a whole. This, too, has been effective in reducing its mass support, especially in counties where Mississippians are less likely to be aware of a clash between the Council and their fellow Americans.

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