

INTERVIEW WITH
DICK GREGORY

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Q. Mr. Gregory, where were you when you first received news of the disappearance of the three civil rights workers?

A. I was in Moscow, Russia.

Q. What were you doing in Moscow?

A. I had been traveling through Europe with forty Japanese on a Ban-the-Bomb Mission and I had been in Russia for two days. We were setting up conference with the Russian Peace Mission there and when I heard the news.

Q. How did you hear the news?

A. Through a UPI reporter in Moscow.

Q. And what did you do after you heard the report?

A. I rushed to the airport and got on a jet, flew to London; I left Moscow at 8:30 a.m. and got to London at 10:30, got to New York at 1:00 o'clock, and Chicago at 3:00 o'clock and was in Jackson, Mississippi, that night.

Q. Who was your prime contact once you hit Mississippi?

A. I went to the COFO office in Jackson. From there we drove to Meridian where Jim Farmer, the head of CORE, had already arrived.

Q. What day did you arrive in Jackson, Mississippi?

A. Tuesday, the 23rd of June, two days after the disappearance.

Q. When you were traveling in that immediate area, what was the emotional climate?

A. I got to Mississippi at night. I didn't talk to anyone but the kids from COFO and they just knew that the three were dead. I didn't really see anyone until I got into Meridian and since Chaney was from Meridian, the climate was very high among the Negroes.

Q. Were the Negroes at that time just about unanimous in their opinion that the three civil rights workers had been killed?

A. Oh, yes. They knew without a shadow of a doubt that they had been killed.

Q. What did you do in Meridian?

A. I met with Jim Farmer and we tried to figure out an angle

Q. An angle for what?

A. To get to talk to Sheriff Rainey. A search party had gone out the night before and we realized that this was our angle. We got enough cars together and we went out on the highway from Meridian to Philadelphia. We were followed by the cops of Meridian. We were followed on the highway by the local police of the various counties we were going through until at one point we were met by about 150 state police. They stopped our caravan.

Q. *How big was the caravan?*

A. About 16 cars.

Q. *What happened when those 150 police stopped you?*

A. I went up front of the caravan where they were telling us that they were having an investigation and that we could not search -- which was good because now we had a stick to make a deal with. They agreed to let some of us talk to the sheriff and the deputy sheriff if we agreed to keep the kids out in the cars until we got back. We agreed to that. So they picked a few -- there were about four of us who went in -- and they set the meeting up. We went to the sheriff's office in Philadelphia. We walked into the sheriff's office and they explained to us that they were very busy, that they were in the middle of an investigation and that all they could give us was thirty minutes. Well, I thought it was kind of strange that they would even see us.

Q. *Why did you think it was strange that they would see you?*

A. Because no Mississippi law enforcement agency -- no law enforcement agency in the world -- would see anyone not connected with the case when they are in the middle of an investigation. So the fact that they would see us meant that they were afraid of something. So we went in and sat down and --

Q. *Excuse me, who from the sheriff's office was in this meeting?*

A. That's what I'm coming to now. After about 20 minutes, they brought us into the room. I figured they were getting everything together. It was very strange; there was Rainey, Price, and Chief Investigator of the State Highway Police, another fellow I don't remember now and the City Attorney. It was very interesting. The City Attorney did all the talking. He said he didn't have anything to do with it and that he wasn't mediating anything.

Q. *This was still in the period when the three kids had only disappeared?*

A. Yes. The sheriff was asked what had happened and he said that he had arrested them because they were doing 75 miles an hour. I brought it to his attention that if you were doing 75 miles an hour, by the time you got caught, the town being so small, you'd be in another county. So then Deputy Sheriff Price said that he was the one who had arrested them.

Q. *First Rainey said he arrested them, then Price said he arrested them?*

A. Yes. They said, "You're right, they weren't going that fast. They were doing 65 miles an hour and it wasn't in town. It was outside of town.

Q. *It was Rainey who said it was outside of town?*

A. Yes. They looked at one another, and they looked at the City Attorney. Then I noticed that for every question we asked them the City Attorney would butt in and almost explain to them how they had to answer. This was when I was aware that these men knew far more than was being said. And I smiled and I told Jim Farmer, "Let's go, we've got all we need." They got kinda shook up at the thought that we didn't use up our thirty minutes time. On the way out, I told Farmer, "Jim I've got the wildest idea." He said, "What?" I said, "You know, the only way we're gonna get it out is with large sums of money. If you'll put up \$ 100,000, we'll break this case in one week." It was then I found out that CORE was broke. That's when I decided to do a 30-day tour.

Q. This was a 30-day tour to raise money for CORE?

A. Yes. I decided it was too good an idea to let go. I honestly believe that if there had been \$100,000 up, there would have been a lot of changes in the case by now. I had to borrow some money so I borrowed \$25,000 from Hugh Heffner as a reward. I announced it that night before I left Meridian and things started happening the next day.

Q. After you left the meeting, you went back to your car and then drove back to Meridian?

A. Yes. We told the sheriff we were going back to see the church that had been burned. He said he would take us by. When we said we wanted to take the whole caravan, he said that wouldn't be possible. So we decided we would just go back to Meridian. We turned all the cars around and went back to Meridian.

Q. It was at Meridian that you made your public statement offering the reward?

A. Yes. I had discussed it with Farmer after we left the sheriff's office. I had to make various calls. I called Joe Glaser first and I couldn't get in touch with him. (Joe is the president of Associated Booking and also is my agent in New York.) Then I called Hugh Heffner and he gave me the money just like that over the phone. I told him I would iron out the details when I got back into Chicago. I made the announcement that night that \$25,000 was up. I knew that there were some big people involved in this and I sincerely believe that \$100,000 would have made a whole lot more people talk. \$25,000 made a lot of people talk, but \$100,000 would make them double-cross one another.

Q. So, after making your announcement in Meridian, you went back to Chicago?

A. Right.

Q. Have you been down there since?

A. No, we have had researchers down there. They have never left. They have stayed down there the whole time just to get information.

Q. As of this date the murderers have not been arrested nor have they been tried for the murder of the three civil rights workers. Has the FBI received all the known information about this case?

A. Oh, yes. They have all the information that's known.

Q. They knew that the boys had been murdered. Did any of them have any idea at that time where the bodies were?

A. No.

Q. How did they find the bodies?

A. I don't really know how they found them. I received a letter quite some time ago that practically pinpointed the spot where the bodies were found. I gave this letter to the FBI and the FBI denied that the letter was any good. But they never denied the location stated in the letter. I question, with the location stated in the letter being so close to the location where they found the bodies, why it took three weeks to find the bodies and dig them up. Incidentally, they never brought the sailors back into that area to search so I would say that they know a hell of a lot down there. It sort of looks like the FBI has been going out of its way to gather information to clear the FBI rather than to solve the crime.

Q. *What more could the FBI do than aid in the discovery of the bodies?*

A. It's not so much what *more* the FBI could do. It's what they have not and are not doing. You know, this whole business is crazy. If these Mississippi white Klansmen, who do not know how to plan crimes, who are ignorant, illiterate bastards, can completely baffle our FBI, what are all those brilliant Communist spies doing to us? A plane crashes and two weeks later the FBI patches up that plane so good that United can damn near use it again. *And* know exactly how it happened, *and* who did it. Do you mean to tell me that the FBI ,can't go into the South and make arrests for racial killings that were not planned, which were not done by clever people? Frankly, I think the FBI is lying and hiding.

Q. *Why would the FBI be lying and hiding?*

A. I think the reason is political. I don't think Hoover has much love for the Negro. When the Negro can have an uprising in New York, and without being asked, Hoover can send his FBI agents into New York, while he isn't too stuck on sending them into the South, then I have to blame Hoover, the head of the organization. I think many crimes could be solved if Hoover handled them differently. I think Hoover handles these things the way he wants to handle them. Hoover, and a lot of others, could be worried about public reaction since a law enforcement agency is involved. Americans might demand that federal troops go in, and no politician is about to send troops into any state this close to an election. A statesman would, but not a politician.

Q. *Then you think the decision not to take strong FBI and other federal action in the Philadelphia case can be attributable somewhat to the President?*

A. Yes. I think the proof is clear. About two and a half months ago the President said that some arrests would be made soon, but there have been no arrests made yet. I don't know what LBJ calls soon but I just figure that someone has advised him against allowing arrests to be made.'

Q. *Do you anticipate that after the election, assuming Johnson is elected, there will be some action in Philadelphia?*

A. I think there will be.

Q. *In the case of the three civil rights workers was there at least one witness other than the killers?*

A. Yes, there is one witness. One fellow who actually hid in the bushes and saw everything

Q. *And he was able to identify the people involved?*

A. Oh, yes. He knew exactly who was doing what.

Q. *Does the FBI have this information?*

A. They have it, but I don't know if they're going to use it or not.

Q. *Is this witness still alive?*

A. Yes.

Q. *Would you like to make a statement of your own regarding the murders of the three civil rights workers?*

A. Yes. I feel that the President of the United States and the FBI are making a big mistake in playing politics with this case. They have embittered Negroes and I would say that if mass rioting breaks out in America you could attribute a lot of it to President Johnson's handling of this case. If the murderers had been arrested the Negro would still have faith in the government. However, nowadays when the FBI is mentioned it is a joke to us. This is an organization that not too many months ago was held in high esteem by most Negroes. I think the President has caused a great injustice to fall on America because the world has watched, and the world knows that this sort of thing would not be tolerated anywhere else in the world. We go all over the world trying to free people; we tell the South Vietnamese how to act; we tell East Germany to drop the Wall. Dr. Martin Luther King went to East Germany and told them to drop the Wall, but we can't even get a Wall dropped over here. No one else on the face of the earth today is blowing up churches and getting away with it. We all know that if a Negro would blow up one church any place, the FBI would not sleep until they brought him in. So, this proves to me that the FBI is not only a very vicious group, but also shows that the FBI, as far as the Negro is concerned, is a second Ku Klux Klan.

Q. What do you think would happen to the case of the three civil rights workers who were murdered and the entire civil rights movement if Senator Goldwater were elected President?

A. I don't know what would happen to the case in Mississippi if Goldwater were elected, but the handling of it couldn't be any worse, that's for sure. As far as the civil rights movement is concerned, that's another story. You see, there comes a point in life whenever you have a thing like this revolution here -- it isn't a revolution of black against white, but a revolution of right against wrong -- where nothing more can happen to hurt you. Nothing can hurt us because we have a pat hand. If Goldwater got in, Goldwater would help us, because for the first time in this country he would bring 22 million black people together. And, man, to anybody who can do that I tip my hat. Goldwater would plug the loophole door in the White House where Negroes have been slipping in and out of, making deals. Once he closes that door, and no Negro can make a deal for another Negro, it's almost like plugging up a rat's hole. And any man who's had his rat's hole plugged up turns into a monster. America would have 22 million monsters here, plus all the good-doing white folks who would come out and commit themselves for the first time. If Martin Luther King were killed tomorrow, Negroes would come into the movement who hadn't been in the movement before. If Roy Wilkins were killed in the morning, if I were killed in the morning, Negroes would come into the movement who aren't in the movement now. So I say, why do we need Negroes killed? And good white folks killed in order to bring Negroes into the movement when Barry Goldwater's getting into the White House would get us all in the movement? Barry Goldwater could not hurt us at all. In no shape, form or fashion.

DICK GREGORY is a comedian, author and civil rights leader. His autobiography, "Nigger!," has recently been published.

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