

Nina Boal

MFDP, CORE, Mississippi, [1965-66](#)

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I went down to Mississippi, first to Clarke County for the summer of 1965 then to Meridian, then into Philadelphia, Mississippi until the end of June, 1966. I worked with MFDP and CORE helping out with voter registration.

When I was in Meridian in November, 1966, I was arrested and put into Meridian jail. While there, they put in another prisoner in my cell who was drunk and violent. When she found out that I was in the civil rights movement, she attacked me with a glass soda bottle and beat me over the back and shoulders several times. The authorities did nothing to stop her until finally they did, after I was bloodied and they had to take me to the hospital, then back to jail. I got out the next day.

While in Philadelphia, I met up with one of the bravest people there, Rev. Clint Collier. We were arrested together in Philadelphia and spent some time in Neshoba County Jail. At one point, I thought that Rev. Collier and I were going to be Civil Rights Workers #4 and #5 to be murdered there. I remember sitting there in the cell and telling myself that when I die, I have to die bravely and not show fear so that I wouldn't bring harm to our movement. This is when I really knew that God was present.

While in Meridian and Philadelphia, I heard so much about Mickey Schwerner, Andy Goodman, and Jim Chaney. I almost felt as if I knew them, even though they had already been murdered before I actually arrived there. They were wonderful and brave people.

I got involved in the James Meredith march, especially when Dr. Martin Luther King decided to have a separate march in Philadelphia because it was the anniversary of the murder of the three civil rights workers. There was a gun battle that night when the Ku Klux Klan sent some night riders into our section of town where the MFDP office was located. The local people bravely helped to defend the MFDP office and drove the KKK away.

I was very young, very militant, and very inexperienced. Some considered me "hot-headed" and they were probably correct. I hope that I did a little bit of good there, but the brave people who were there certainly helped me in my life. For that, I'll always be grateful.

Since traveling south to Mississippi, I returned to Chicago, my home at the time. There I helped out Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his attempts to fight segregation and racism in Chicago. Dr. King said that Chicago was worse than Mississippi, and he was right.

I later joined in the feminist and gay rights movements and also the libertarian movement. Today, I also participate in the religious organization Soul Force, which has some other southern civil rights veterans involved. Because of my age and an injury to my back, I mostly play a supportive and financial donation role within Soul Force. The goal of Soul Force is to end spiritual violence against gay people as perpetrated by some of the anti-gay bigotry in too many religious institutions.

We shall overcome.

MERIDIAN JAIL

by Nina Boal, December 1965

locked up doing time
no money to pay my fine
they take in robbers, vagrants, drunks
but i'm not drunk
i'm just a civil rights worker
from the north
who had no money
i lay in bed wondering
how i'll do my time
doze off
"SAM JONES, SAM JONES
COME HERE!"
"YOU BASTARD SONOFABITHCES
I'M NOT DRUNK!
YOU LOUSY CHICKEN-SHIT
LOWDOWN..."
"Come, get into the cell
sleep if off"
"YOU MOTHERFUCKING..."
doze off
strange beautiful dreams
about raging-orange sunsets
cool, glass-blue Lake Michigan
where you swim & let it
cool-wash over you
"HEY YOU!
get your breakfast!"
"huh?" i see the hard bed
get up & get it but i
don't feel like eating that slop
& the oppressing heat presses
eat a bisket
read my book & go off

into another world
they bring a drunk woman in
"I'M NOT DRUNK YOU BASTARDS!"
"come on."
she talks to me
"honey, you gotta help me i'm not drunk
i was sleeping, honest
i wasn't drunk."
"i understand."
"you know all men are equal
i like the colored people
i don't wanna do them bad."
"it's just skin-color," i say
"nothing else."
i don't know why people act
so strange & mean."
we smoke & talk & i go
& buy cigarettes for her
& a coke
i wonder why people get drunk
"Thank you honey, you've been
so good to me."
"it's alright."
"god, I'M NOT DRUNK!"
"i know. i'll help you."
i wish they'd get her out of here.
"honey, when i get out, i'll
buy you cigarettes & visit you.
no, i'm not drunk
yes, i'll visit you."
i want to sleep, i wish someone'd
go her bail.
"say, are you one of those
damn Freedom Riders?"
Silence
"YOU DAMN BITCH
SLUT, WHITE TRASH
YOU CAUSE ALL
THE TROUBLE HERE
YOU LOWDOWN SORRY
BITCH FREEDOM RIDER!"
"but it's just the color..."
"YOU'D MARRY A NIGGER?
HEY, GET ME OUT OF THIS CELL
WITH THIS WHITE TRASH FREEDOM RIDER!"
God, what did i do?

"BOY, I'M GONNA GET YOU!"
takes a coke bottle
"GET UNER THAT BLANKET!"
no
GET UNDER, YOU SLUT!"
no, i won't & the coke bottle shatters
on the wall
over my back & she hits me &
i go into non-violent position &
she hits some more
police come, take her off &
i feel blood on my back
trembling
they take me to a hospital
for a check up
then to see if i have venereal disease
"what happened?"
"oh" (he shrugs) "a civil rights
worker got attacked."
back in my cell on my bed
alone & peace (relatively)
what did i do to that woman?
poor twisted drunk woman
i can't hate her, she's too sorry
non-violence i guess
Love overcomes hate
"Love your enemies
bless them that curse you
do good to them that
despitefully use you."
i feel sick
the white walls
of the cell closing in
white like me
someday
when the Freedom Ship comes in
when the Freedom Train arrives...
god, i want to get out of here
we shall overcome...
shit
"hey you! supper!"
i can't eat now, dammit
next time they put someone
like that in here
i'm going to tear her apart
why didn't i do it before, i should have

but i didn't
i feel sorry for her
someday we're going to walk
hand in hand
& we're not going to hate anymore
ow, shit, my shoulder
why didn't those damn cops come sooner
why don't they treat you like
you're a human being?
someday i'm gonna...
someday that Freedom Ship's
going to arrive...

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[NOTE, 2006 by Nina Boal: "Meridian Jail" describes an incident that happened to me at the end of November, 1965 when I was 19 years of age and was jailed in Meridian, Mississippi. At the time, I was working for MFDP and CORE as a volunteer from the Chicago area; I was working in Philadelphia, MS, but had come into Meridian for a meeting. This is the first (and probably the last) poem that I've written. I am typing it online exactly as I wrote it back in 1965 (including any spelling errors).]