

Southern Hospitality

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Summary: Retells the indignity and jailing that an interracial group endured in Shreveport, Louisiana. (DDLW #239).

When young people engaged in works of mercy in the apostolate are picked up on two occasions by the police and held in jail merely because one of them happens to be colored, one would consider it news and play it up. Of course a community like Shreveport, Louisiana, which has received an award for good community relations, might well want to hush the matter up. But for us of the lay apostolate who look upon these friends as having been “considered worthy to suffer for Christ,” we feel that some attention should be paid to the story. It all goes to show the stranglehold the State has on us all, when even Catholics pass over so lightly, or seem to hush up a bit of heroic bravery on the part of some young people doing interracial work. A few hours or a night in jail may seem a small matter, but terror, whether it lasts for a moment or a night long, still remains terror. One accommodates oneself to fear after a time.

Ann Foley, Mary Dolan, Frank Petter, Loretta Butler and Larry Pausback, are those who suffered this indignity (from the worldly sense) of imprisonment. In June of this year some of the Friendship House workers were first picked up and brought to the police station where Fr. Gremillion came to the rescue after a few hours. Fr. Gremillion is a young priest in the Lafayette diocese who has been an outstanding leader working against injustice, labor and racial. But the second time a group of four of the F.H. group was picked up was in August when the young priest was in Europe.

Frank Petta, a school teacher whom we had all known from some time, a neighbor on Grand Street in New York, who had worked as a volunteer at Friendship House had gone for a vacation visit to Shreveport and while there had committed the serious error of boarding with a Negro family for his two weeks’ visit. Friendship House workers have always, these fifteen years or so of work for the Negro lived in the same slums with them, sharing their homes. Larry Pausback and Loretta Butler, a colored girl working in the Washington, D.C. house, never away from the North before, were also visitors there. Either Ann Foley or Mary Dolan had gone with them to show the sights of Shreveport, and they had driven in a car to the outskirts of the city to see a lake, and while they parked the car, a police car drew up and the officers accosted them. They summoned several other police cars, and with this mob escort (as though to warn of other mob action threatening) they brought them to jail where they were not permitted to telephone and let people know where they were, and they were held overnight.

This happened at seven-fifteen in the evening. The police lectured them as a group, telling them what they thought of the Friendship House interracial movement, and then questioned them all separately. In the morning, they were released at eight-thirty. In the September issue of the Catholic Interracialist Frank Petta tells the story of his drive north with a Negro companion and the difficulty they had in getting sleeping accommodations or anything to eat even in the State of Illinois, on their way to Chicago. Loretta Butler tells what it feels like to be a Negro in the South.