Misc II - KKK

THE NEW YORK TIMES, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 1967 C 31

Defense Calls 2 Negroes as Character Witnesses for Mississippi Klan Chief

By WALER RUGABER
Special to The New York Times

MERIDIAN, Miss., Oct. 16—Two Negroes appeared in Federal District Court today as character witnesses for Sam H. Bowers Jr. of Laurel, a man repeatedly identified as Imperial Wizard of the White Knights of the Ku Llux Klan. tians had planned and carried

The two were Mrs. Amie Coleman, who said she had lived in Laurel since 1910 and worked for Bowers at a theater he once owned, and J. C. Powe, also of Laurel, who testified he had known the reputed Klan chieftain for 18 or 19 years.

Mr. Powe's ties to Bowers were not explored, but he said he had known the white man as a distributor of "those machines you play records in." The Negro indicated he knew nothing of any Klan activities by Bowers.

The witnesses were questioned by Travis Buckley, a defense lawyer inthe conspiracy trial of 18 men accused in the lynching of three young civil rights workers in Mississippi in 1964. Mr. Buckley addressed the Negroes as "Amie" and "J. C."

Government witnesses have testified earlier in the trial that Bowers had characterized the murders as "a job to be proud of" and as "the first time Chris- out the execution of a Jew."

The slain youths were Michael H. Schwerner 24 years old, of New York, a white field worker for the Congress of Racial Equality, Andrew Goodman 20, of New York, a white college student, and James E. Chaney 21, of Meridian, a Negro plasterer.

The Government has charged Bowers and 17 other men with plotting to deny the rights workers their constitutional rights. Conviction carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a $5,000 fine.

The three youths disappeared on June 21, 1964. Their bodies were found on Aug. 4, buried in an earthen dam. The state courts have taken no action in the case, and murder is not a Federal offense unless committed on Government property.

Mrs. Coleman and Mr. Powe were among the more than 40 character witnesses who appeared for the defense today. Also, in testimony, six of the defendants were said to have been somewhere else on the day the killings occurred.

United Press International Telephoto
Sam H. Bowers Jr.

United Press International Telephoto
Mrs. Amie Coleman

Alibi witnesses took the stand for Bernard L. Akin, a house trailer dealer; Frank J. Herndon, a drive-in restaurant operator; former Sheriff E. G. (Hop) Barnett; Billy W. Posey, a service station operator; Cecil R. Price, Chief Deputy Sheriff of Neshoba County; and Jerry M. Sharpe, a pulpwood hauler.

One witness, Finnis McAdory, said he found Price at the police station in Philadelphia, Miss., when he came in at 10:30 P.M. on June 21 to complain that his young niece was missing with two boys.

Price and two unidentified policemen went out with him to find the three youngsters, Mr. McAdory said, adding that the deputy remained with him until about midnight. The witness said he also saw Price at the police station between 1 and 1:30 A.M.

Mr. McAdory's wife, who said she accompanied the men during the search, told the same story. She was then cross-examined by John Doar, the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights.

Mr. Doar asked Mrs. Mcadory, the latest in a series of defense witnesses from Meshoba County, who had first called upon her to remember the events of June 21.

The witness hesitated and then replied:

"I'm testifying for my county there."

She subsequently said that her husband had asked whether she recalled the day. Also, she said, Deputy Price "asked me if I saw him . . . on the 21st of June."

The Government contends that Deputy Price arrested the rights workers in the afternoon, released them from jail at about 10:30 P.M., recaptured them after a highway chase, and joined the mob that shot them.

Mrs. A. L. Posey, Posey's mother, testified that she had been with the defendant at his home on June 21 and remained with him until 11 P.M.

B. D. Burnside, an alibi witness for Akin, said he talked with the defendant about a job at his trailer dealership on the evening of June 21. Mr. Burnside said he later had some difficulty recalling the date he spent with Mr. Akin.