

# Blast Victim Regarded as Top Rights Organizer

## Helped to Register Voters in the Deep South

By CHARLAYNE HUNTER

Ralph E. Featherstone, a 31-year-old former official of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee who was killed in a dynamite blast Monday night, was regarded as one of the best organizers in the Civil Rights movement during the Deep South voter registration campaigns of the early nineteen-sixties.

As a field secretary for the organization under John Lewis, its first chairman, Mr. Featherstone was active in civil rights campaigns throughout the South. But the work that brought him the most recognition within the movement was done in Mississippi.

He left Washington and a career as a speech therapist to go to Oxford, Ohio, where a coalition of civil rights groups was preparing student volunteers from all over the country for the Mississippi Summer Project.

### Massive Campaign

The project had been organized by the Council of Federated Organizations and included the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Congress of Racial Equality and S.N.C.C., which has since changed its name to the Student National Coordinating Committee. The project was to be the most massive voter registration campaign undertaken in the Deep South.

Mr. Featherstone arrived in Philadelphia, Miss., in June, 1964, during the week that three civil rights workers—Andrew Goodman, James Chaney and Michael Schwerner—disappeared. The bodies of the three men were found six weeks later a few miles out of town.

Despite the tensions brought on by the disappearance of the three rights workers, the program continued. Mr. Featherstone was put in charge of the



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Ralph Featherstone was a victim of the fatal blast.

Freedom Force, the project's teaching cadre.

He traveled throughout the state, coordinating the schools and setting up courses in black history, African history and the social, economic and political problems of black Mississippi.

He remained in the S.N.C.C. through three chairmen, and even though the group diminished in size and influence, he never severed his connection with it.

### SNCC Newsletter

Mr. Featherstone's more controversial activities with the S.N.C.C. include a trip to an international cultural congress in Havana in 1968 and a statement against "Jewish Oppressors" in 1967.

In an interview published in a Havana newspaper, he said: "We are here to discuss with the other delegates the ways to communicate a message to the oppressed Negroes of America that will prepare them to resist."

"Here we feel this is the only

## Served as Field Secretary for S.N.C.C. in '60's

free territory in America."

The statement against alleged Jewish oppressors was made in a SNCC newsletter that attacked Zionism and accused Jews of committing atrocities against Arabs. Mr. Featherstone denied that the organization was anti-Semitic but spoke for the organization in defending the statement when it came under attack later by Jewish and civil rights organizations. Most of the Jewish supporters of SNCC withdrew their financial and moral support at the time.

Mr. Featherstone left the South last summer after having helped set up a catfish farm cooperative in West Point, Miss. Since then, he had worked as the manager of the Drum and Spear, a bookstore in Washington that is owned by a group of former civil rights workers.

### 'Believed in People'

Mr. Featherstone, a handsome, dark-skinned man of medium height and build, was described by friends and associates as a "soft-spoken man" but one who was analytical and firm in his judgments.

"He believed in people being able to determine their own destinies," Mr. Lewis said of his former colleague.

Mrs. Lillie Jones, a 71-year-old resident of Neshoba County, Mississippi, said that, whenever Mr. Featherstone came to Neshoba County, "he made his home my house." She said yesterday that black people there "would never forget him."

"He done a lot of good work," she said, "and we all appreciated the things he did."

Mr. Featherstone, who was recently married, is survived by his wife, Charlotte, his parents and three brothers and four sisters.

Funeral arrangements are incomplete.

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