

# **Burning of African American Churches in Mississippi and Perceptions of Race Relations**

**Executive Summary of a Community Forum  
Held July 10–11, 1996, Cleveland, Mississippi  
by the Mississippi Advisory Committee to the  
United States Commission on Civil Rights**

## **The United States Commission on Civil Rights**

The United States Commission on Civil Rights, first created by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, and reestablished by the United States Commission on Civil Rights Act of 1983, is an independent, bipartisan agency of the Federal Government. By the terms of the 1983 act, as amended by the Civil Rights Commission Amendments Act of 1994, the Commission is charged with the following duties pertaining to discrimination or denials of the equal protection of the laws based on race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin, or in the administration of justice: investigation of individual discriminatory denials of the right to vote; study and collection of information relating to discrimination or denials of the equal protection of the law; appraisal of the laws and policies of the United States with respect to discrimination or denials of equal protection of the law; maintenance of a national clearinghouse for information respecting discrimination or denials of equal protection of the law; investigation of patterns or practices of fraud or discrimination in the conduct of Federal elections; and preparation and issuance of public service announcements and advertising campaigns to discourage discrimination or denials of equal protection of the law. The Commission is also required to submit reports to the President and the Congress at such times as the Commission, the Congress, or the President shall deem desirable.

## **The State Advisory Committees**

An Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights has been established in each of the 50 States and the District of Columbia pursuant to section 105(c) of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and section 3(d) of the Civil Rights Commission Amendments Act of 1994. The Advisory Committees are made up of responsible persons who serve without compensation. Their functions under their mandate from the Commission are to: advise the Commission of all relevant information concerning their respective States on matters within the jurisdiction of the Commission; advise the Commission on matters of mutual concern in the preparation of reports of the Commission to the President and the Congress; receive reports, suggestions, and recommendations from individuals, public and private organizations, and public officials upon matters pertinent to inquiries conducted by the State Advisory Committee; initiate and forward advice and recommendations to the Commission upon matters in which the Commission shall request the assistance of the State Advisory Committee; and attend, as observers, any open hearing or conference that the Commission may hold within the State.

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**Mississippi Advisory Committee to the  
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights**

**Dr. Jerry W. Ward, Jr.,** *Chairperson*  
Ridgeland

**Mr. Robert H. Canizaro**  
Jackson

**Mr. Willie H. Foster**  
Hattiesburg

**Senator Alice V. Harden**  
Jackson

**Mrs. Suzanne G. Keys**  
Jackson

**Ms. Lisa Binder Milner**  
Jackson

**Mr. Leslie Grant Range**  
Jackson

**Mr. Benjamin Wade Allen III**  
Jackson

**Ms. Barbara Longest**  
Holly Springs

**Mr. James M. Lott**  
Greenwood

**Mr. Tommy A. Morris**  
Tougaloo

**Ms. Thelma A. Rush**  
Vicksburg

## **Burning of African American Churches in Mississippi and Perceptions of Race Relations**

Fires have been deliberately set at seven African American churches in Mississippi since November 1995. These churches were among the more than 59 arsons of African American churches in the South between January 1995 and June 1996<sup>1</sup> that attracted national attention and sympathy.

As the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, in a statement issued June 14, 1996, noted: "Southern rural black churches...were rallying points for many galvanizing demonstrations that ushered in the modern civil rights movement. As religious institutions, black churches were havens for the people who marched for five days from Selma to Montgomery, shelters where freedom riders ate and slept, hosts for meetings and voter registration drives, and headquarters for the Montgomery bus boycott."<sup>2</sup> Fires and bombs were used against the churches in retaliation.

In the current rash of fires,<sup>3</sup> on November 1, 1995, the Lynn Chapel United Methodist Church in Clinton, some 10 miles due west of the State capital, Jackson, lost its kitchen to fire. The building of the 60-member congregation also suffered some smoke damage. A young black man was arrested; he has pleaded not guilty. Police believe he was looking for attention.

St. Paul Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Smithville, which is in the northeast part of the State, was one of the victims of 13 fires set on March 5, 1996, by propane torch. Other fires were set at a home and in the grass and woods. The church has 80 members and was founded in 1886. The damage to the church was about \$500.

On March 21, 1996, Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Ruleville was damaged by a fire set about 10:30 a.m. Located to the northeast of Greenville, the 50-member church was founded in 1948 and is by a bridge on which Klan slogans have been found. Pews were burned and there was extensive smoke damage.

Satartia was the location of the next fire, on March 30, 1996. Satartia is central Mississippi, northwest of Jackson. Many fires had been set in the vicinity previously, and the fire at El Bethel

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<sup>1</sup> Current information on the fires is taken largely from a fact sheet issued by the National Church Arson Task Force (U.S. Department of Justice and Department of Treasury), "African American Church Fire Investigations in the South" (January 1, 1995 to September 4, 1996) and "Black Church Burnings: Why They Did It," *USA Today*, July 1, 1996. As Federal investigators and others have discovered, not all fires at rural black churches have been reported.

<sup>2</sup> Statement of the United States Commission on Civil Rights on Burnings of African American Churches, p. 2, June 14, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> In April 1993 two African American churches were burned in Amite and Pike Counties on the anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Three persons pleaded guilty to Federal conspiracy charges. National Church Arson Task Force, p. 7.

Missionary Baptist Church was put out before it did any damage. (The church was under construction.) Local charges have been filed against a white man for the two fires set that day (the other at a home). All the other properties burned were white owned, and the alleged perpetrator has been described by local authority as a "lifelong firebug."

On April 7, 1996, St. Paul's Primitive Church was destroyed in Lauderdale, in the central east part of the State near the border with Alabama. The 54-member church was founded in 1930 and was burned between 11:00 and 11:30 a.m. The fire is officially considered accidental, but there is dispute about that.<sup>4</sup>

Two more African American churches burned on June 17, 1996, in Kossuth in northeast Mississippi. The fire at Mt. Pleasant Missionary Church, whose congregation numbers 150, was reported at 9:11 p.m. Damage amounted to \$150,000. At 9:18 p.m. a second fire was reported 4 miles away, at Central Grove Missionary Baptist Church. Central Grove Missionary, which has 75 members, suffered an estimated \$100,000 in damage. The same fuel was used to start the two fires.

The Mississippi Advisory Committee held a planning meeting in Hattiesburg on June 20, 1996. At that time the Advisory Committee took note of three black church fires in the State.<sup>5</sup> Further information showed that arson or attempted arson had taken place at more than double that number of African American churches in Mississippi. In addition, during an visit to the Ruleville area, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights staff received information on three additional church burnings that had not been reported in the national press, two in Dockery and one in Bolivar County.<sup>6</sup>

### **Mississippi Snapshot**

Mississippi ranks number two among the States and the District of Columbia in the proportion of African American residents. In 1990 Mississippians were 63.5 percent white and 35.6 percent black, with American Indians (0.3 percent), Asian Americans (0.5 percent), and Hispanics (0.6) constituting the rest of the population. Overall, in 1992, the population stood at 2,615,208, an

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<sup>4</sup> Black Church Burnings: Why They Did It, *USA Today*, July 1, 1996, p. 5A, reports that a church deacon who closed up the church said he must have set the fire accidentally with a cigarette, but later black leaders said he had been bullied into making that statement. The National Church Arson Task Force considers the fire accidental. See National Arson Church Task Force, p. 8. Also see statement of James Cavanaugh, ATF, regarding the physical evidence leading to the conclusion that the fire was accidental in Mississippi Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Transcript of Community Forum, July 10, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Minutes, Meeting of the Mississippi Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, June 20, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Staff interviews, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Central Regional Office, with Shirley Edwards, Mayor of Ruleville, MS and Wayne Nicolas, managing editor, *Bolivar Commercial*, June 24-25, 1996.



increase of 3.7 percent since 1980.<sup>7</sup> The population of Sunflower County is 35.3 percent white and 64.2 percent black.<sup>8</sup> Bolivar and Leflore Counties are, respectively, 62.9 percent and 60.6 percent black.<sup>9</sup> Ruleville had a population in 1990 of 3,245 persons, of which black persons were 53 percent.<sup>10</sup> Ruleville had 65 percent voting age black population, which is the same percentage as Sunflower County.<sup>11</sup>

Ruleville lies in Sunflower County in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, one of the impoverished areas of the United States. In 1990 nearly 42 percent of the people in Sunflower County lived in poverty and median household income was \$14,431.<sup>12</sup> In adjoining Bolivar and Leflore Counties, the respective poverty rates were 42.9 percent (median household income, \$14,020) and 38.9 percent (median household income, \$15,219).<sup>13</sup> For Mississippi as a whole, median household income was \$20,136.<sup>14</sup> Ruleville had median income in 1990 of \$13,404 and a per capita income of \$6,843.<sup>15</sup>

Mississippi does not have a State hate crimes act but does have a penalty enhancement law, enacted in 1994, for felonies or misdemeanors committed because of the race, color, ancestry, ethnicity, religion, national origin, or gender of the victim.<sup>16</sup> There is no State human relations or human rights commission or agency. In the two most recent reports under the Federal Hate Crimes Statistics Act (which called for voluntary reporting of hate crimes to the Federal Bureau of Investigation), five Mississippi law enforcement agencies reported six incidents in 1994<sup>17</sup> and no Mississippi agencies reported in 1993.<sup>18</sup>

Mississippi's 751 elected black officials in 1993 were 12.8 percent of all elected officials.<sup>19</sup> These officials held 42 seats in the State legislature,<sup>20</sup> 158 seats on county governing bodies and other

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1992 City and County Data Book*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303; figures for 1990.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Mississippi Official and Statistical Register, 1992-1996*, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> *Mississippi Official and Statistical Register, 1992-1996*, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 889.

<sup>16</sup> Section 99-19-301 to Section 99-19-306, ch. 572, Miss. Code.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Hate Crime Statistics 1994*, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Hate Crime Statistics 1993*, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Press, *Black Elected Officials: A National Roster, 1993* (Washington, D.C.: 1994), table 2, p. xxiii.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, table 6, p. xxvii, and table 7, p. xxviii.

county bodies,<sup>21</sup> 337 municipal offices,<sup>22</sup> and 126 judicial and law enforcement offices.<sup>23</sup> Ruleville has a mayor/board of aldermen form of government. The mayor is Shirley Edwards, a black female. There are five aldermen of whom three are female, and three black persons serve on the board.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Forum in Cleveland**

On July 10-11, 1996, the Mississippi Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights held a community forum<sup>25</sup> at Delta State University's Performing Arts Center in Cleveland, Mississippi, on the arson of black churches in the Ruleville area of Mississippi. The purpose of the forum was to assess the investigative procedures of Federal, State, and local law enforcement officials and to examine race relations in the affected communities. Eight Federal, State, and local law enforcement officials gave the Advisory Committee information on their response to the church burnings. Other invited participants included members of the religious community, elected officials, and experts on the Delta region and on hate crimes. The Advisory Committee also wanted to receive information on the causes, effects, and solutions to the church burnings in the Ruleville area. Following the discussants, the Advisory Committee opened up the forum to hear from the public.

### **Summary**

Committee Chair Dr. Ward welcomed the panelists and public and introduced Regional Director Melvin Jenkins to the community forum. Mr. Jenkins noted that this was the fourth community forum among six on the issue of the church fires in the Southeast. Members of the Mississippi Advisory Committee present were introduced: Willie H. Foster, Suzanne Griggins Keys, James H. Lott, and Leslie G. Range.

Committee Chair Dr. Ward presided over the forum and recognized Dr. Mary Frances Berry, Chairperson of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Dr. Berry praised the efforts of the Advisory Committee for organizing this forum and highlighted its contributions to the Commission. Dr. Berry said that the Commission's studies have found racial and ethnic tensions to be on the rise. She stated that she was not surprised by the church fires and asked that the Advisory Committee help get at the root of the tension.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., table 10, p. xxxi.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., table 13, p. xxxiv.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., table 15, p. xxxvi.

<sup>24</sup> Staff interview, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Central Regional Office, with Shirley Edwards, Mayor of Ruleville, MS, June 24, 1996.

<sup>25</sup> The State Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights do not have subpoena power. When a community forum is held, the Advisory Committee invites persons to present differing points of view on an issue. Since the Advisory Committee cannot compel participation, persons invited to present information may not appear. At the conclusion of such forums, persons in the audience who wish to present a statement on the topic of the forum are permitted to do so.



The Advisory Committee first heard from a panel of Federal law enforcement officials, which included James Cavanaugh, ATF special agent in charge, and Jim Friar, FBI agent. James Cavanaugh, ATF special agent in charge, Birmingham Division, which covers Alabama and Mississippi, described the upswing in black church fires to the Advisory Committee as a very unusual event. Contrary to reports from other areas, Agent Cavanaugh said, his division has recognized a cluster of fires in Alabama and Mississippi. Agent Cavanaugh stated that churches fall victim to crime, vandalism, burglary, hate crimes, and desecration

Agent Cavanaugh told the Advisory Committee that ATF's investigation of the Kossuth church fires found two black churches completely destroyed within 17 minutes of each other in northeast Mississippi. At a white church located nearby, there was evidence of what appeared to be an incendiary device and some marks on the back door that appeared to be a forced entry, Agent Cavanaugh reported. That church was not destroyed.

Mr. Cavanaugh described other church fires in the State, pointing out that some are accidental, for example, from smoking or lightning, but others are not. He rejected the allegation that an Easter Sunday church fire, accidentally set by a cigarette, was the work of an arsonist. ATF thoroughly examined the pattern of the flames, test burns, and the testimony given by witnesses, he said. Mr. Cavanaugh said the fire in Meridian was investigated by the State fire marshal. He told the Advisory Committee that churches were not receiving rebuilding funds for structures accidentally burned. He explained that ATF has no jurisdictional basis to aid the churches, but he thought the Advisory Committee should be aware of such instances.

In Ruleville, not far from the site of the forum, the fire that destroyed church pews was a burglary with evidence of a forced entry, reported Mr. Cavanaugh. A bridge 100 yards from the church is covered with graffiti—KKK Rules, a swastika, and other writings. Mr. Cavanaugh told the Advisory Committee that the ATF investigation determined that the graffiti has been on the bridge for some time. The bridge is known as a party site for youth who abuse drugs and alcohol. The ATF investigation in Ruleville revealed that there had been 28 church burglaries since January 1996 in five adjacent counties in the central Delta area. Mr. Cavanaugh explained that a number of white and black suspects have been arrested in connection with the burglarized churches, which included both black and white. The investigation was carried out with the assistance of regional ATF, FBI, State troopers, and two reassigned Miami, Florida, ATF agents. Mr. Cavanaugh concluded by stating that the coordinated investigative response by Mississippi officials to the Kossuth and other fires in the State was exceptional.

The Advisory Committee asked Mr. Cavanaugh several questions regarding the investigations. Mr. Lott asked the ATF agent about disparities in the number of fires reported in the media and inquired further if there were more white churches than black churches set afire. Mr. Cavanaugh replied that as of July 1, 1996, ATF had investigated 37 burned black churches in the Southeast that had been torched within the last 18 months. He added that ATF and the FBI were leading the investigations, with the State fire marshals supplying information on the fires. Mr. Lott also

inquired about the various motives that are being investigated by law enforcement. The ATF and the FBI, Mr. Cavanaugh replied, are looking at all the angles, using the evidence found at the fire scene in their attempt to find a cause and a motive for these church crimes and fires. Mr. Cavanaugh noted a variety of motives for the church fires, including hate, arson to cover burglary, revenge, financial, a hero complex, a copycat effect, and satanism.

When asked by Mr. Lott if there was a relationship between the arsons and the location of the churches, Mr. Cavanaugh responded that most of the churches are located in isolated rural areas, thus rendering them easy targets. Because the fires are not noticed until late, he explained, evidence has been difficult to gather. He added that all types of techniques are being used to solve the arsons, including hypnosis.

Mr. Range asked if the media was doing a fair job reporting the fires. Mr. Cavanaugh responded that the media is accurately reporting the fires, especially the arrests from the cases. He noted that certain private organizations are not as precise in reporting the number of fires. Mr. Cavanaugh told the Advisory Committee that there have been 11 arrests in the 37 fires. He said that reports of the arrests help to dissuade potential arsonists. The national arson success rate is 16 percent, Mr. Cavanaugh said, adding that he hoped to surpass that rate in the church fires.

When asked by Committee Chair Dr. Ward if there was evidence that the fires were the work of professional or amateurs, Mr. Cavanaugh replied that investigators can distinguish between the two. He told the Advisory Committee of ATF's findings. He explained that both fires in Kossuth involved forced entry, flammable liquid, and occurred 17 minutes apart. The cluster of fires in Alabama did not yield much evidence. The fire in Yazoo, Mississippi was probably set with a match or small lighter. The Ruleville fire began when a hymn book was set afire in a pew. The fire in Ruleville burned itself out, thus sparing the structure. However, the pews were destroyed.

When Dr. Berry asked about leads into the fires, Mr. Cavanaugh told the Advisory Committee that the leads in Mississippi were more concrete than Alabama. Asked by Dr. Berry if there was evidence that members of any church burned down their own place of worship, Mr. Cavanaugh said there was no such motive in the Kossuth fires since one of the churches was severely underinsured and the other had no insurance. He added that was no evidence of internal disputes among the members. In response to Dr. Berry's question about the motive behind the fires at white churches, Mr. Cavanaugh told the Advisory Committee that there is no evidence of white churches being burned by someone black for racial reasons.

Regarding the participation of ATF agents in the "Good Old Boys Roundup," Mr. Cavanaugh said there were no agents involved in the church investigation who participated or witnessed the racist activities at that picnic.

Dr. Berry asked Mr. Cavanaugh if he had enough resources to carry out the task of solving the church fires. Although law enforcement officials have arrested 11 persons in the 37 cases they have investigated, Mr. Cavanaugh told the Advisory Committee that he did not have sufficient

resources to complete the mission assigned to his office. As of the Advisory Committee's forum, he had requested additional staff from ATF's Headquarters to investigate the Ruleville fires. Because of a lack of staff, Mr. Cavanaugh noted, he has agents from various points in the United States assigned to his office to help investigate the fires.

Jim Friar, the FBI agent in charge in Mississippi, told the Advisory Committee that the FBI has an aggressive program in Mississippi that looks at all violations of civil rights law. In regard to the church arsons, he said, the FBI has used various Federal laws that enable it to work any kind of crime against religious institutions provided that there is an element of interstate commerce involved. There has to be a minimum monetary damage of \$10,000. The 1994 the Freedom of Access to Clinical Institutions Act (FACE) eliminated the interstate nexus and the requirement for a \$10,000 threshold, but reduced the first offense to a misdemeanor.

The FBI is part of the National Arson Task Force headed by Deval Patrick of the Department of Justice and James Johnson of the Treasury Department. The purpose of the task force is to collate data, divert resources to the areas with the greatest needs, identify the number of churches burned, assure the affected churches have been addressed, and serve as a coordinating body for churches that have been burned. The task force is multijurisdictional and serves to collect information from different States to get the overall picture on church burnings. In the event of a fire, responses will come from the FBI, ATF, State highway patrol, U.S. Attorney's office, and State fire marshal. The Kossuth fires, he said, were a blow to all those involved. Mr. Friar said that the investigators remain optimistic that the cases will be solved.

Mr. Friar said that since the establishment of the National Arson Task Force, the number of church fires since 1990 has been collected. The FBI agent noted that certain State fire marshals do not receive reports of fires, thus making the number of fires difficult to ascertain. There is no central body to collect the information on fires, he said. He elaborated by explaining that a fire in Jackson, Mississippi, would be reported to the local fire department, but there is no requirement that the State fire marshal be notified. To gather data, Mr. Friar said the FBI had to go from one fire department to another and one State fire marshal to another.

Mr. Lott asked when the FACE legislation is likely to be employed. Mr. Friar said that Federal prosecutors use it when the damage is less than \$10,000 or where an interstate issue does not exist. He added that legislation for stiffer penalties was being considered. When asked how long FBI was tracking arsons of religious institutions, Mr. Friar responded that since 1993, two churches in Pike and Amite Counties were set afire for hate-based reasons. Both arsonists are incarcerated. Regarding the profile of the convicted arsonists, Mr. Friar described them as kids. When Mr. Foster asked him to define what he meant by the term kids, Mr. Friar said that meant they were under 21 years, unemployed, and easily motivated to do something stupid.

In response to Mr. Lott's inquiry about whether hate crime activities in the area were group or individual, Mr. Friar replied that attempts to hold Klan rallies in the area have failed in the past several years. He said there have been hate crimes in the area. He told the Advisory Committee

that the fires at the Kossuth churches may be the result of hatred. He added that no matter what the motive, the congregations of the Kossuth churches are devastated. Committee Chair Dr. Ward asked if the fires were investigated as patterns or individually. Mr. Friar said each fire is looked upon as a crime. He added that a hate crime coordinator on the National Arson Task Force is working to determine if there is a link between the fires.

When Dr. Berry asked if there were sufficient funds to investigate the fires, Mr. Friar said currently the FBI has sufficient staff resources to investigate the fires. He added that if things got worse, there would be some difficulties. When asked if racial tension is on the rise in Mississippi, Mr. Friar said, race is a central issue in Mississippi all the time. But he does not believe racial tension is rising and said the State is in better shape than some others.

Responding to Dr. Berry's question about the interaction of various law enforcement groups, Mr. Friar replied that there was no duplication of work. Regarding hate crime in Mississippi, Mr. Friar told the Advisory Committee that complaints about housing discrimination and police brutality have decreased. When Dr. Berry pressed about other hate crime activities such as graffiti, cross burnings, or other expressions of religious and racial animus, other than the church burnings, Mr. Friar said there were a couple of cross burnings.

Mr. Friar was followed by Jim Ingram, Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Public Safety. He mentioned in his remarks that he meets often with Mr. Friar of the FBI to discuss problems in Mississippi. As the State's representative to the White House meeting on church burnings, Mr. Ingram felt that Mississippi was better prepared than most other Southern States, possibly because of the State's history with hate crimes, civil rights violations, fire bombings, killings, and so on. Mr. Ingram agreed that there is evidence of racial animus behind the fires, but he rejected the notion of a national conspiracy as there is no evidence to support such a claim. Mr. Ingram told the Advisory Committee that the individuals behind the fires in Pike and Amite Counties were serving a 37-month sentence.

Mr. Ingram has made available the complete and full resources of the department's eight divisions, including the crime lab and the State police, to the FBI, ATF, and fire marshal's office for work on any type of hate crime or church burnings. For the fires in Kossuth, 75 State investigators were assigned by the Department of Public Safety. Commissioner Ingram stated that the church fires in Alcorn County would be solved. In addition to using the latest investigative techniques, Mr. Ingram said polygraphs and hypnosis have also been used.

Mr. Foster asked Mr. Ingram his opinion of a 37-month sentence for the arson of a religious house. Mr. Ingram replied that he does not like to comment on decisions reached by judges but added that he supported legislation to increase penalties for the arson of houses of worship. He added that the individuals were sentenced under Federal law because it was easier to get a conviction than under State law. In reply to Mr. Range's question, Mr. Ingram answered that the perpetrators of the current church burnings are vastly different from those who committed the hate crimes of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Today, the lawbreaker can be a pyromaniac, a person bent on using

graffiti, or someone destroying graves in a cemetery. While the situation is serious, investigators have not detected a pattern of conspiracy in church burnings. However, he noted that there is evidence of racial motivation and some hate crimes.

Mr. Range asked Mr. Ingram his opinion of HUD Secretary Cisneros' recommendation that churches be patrolled. Mr. Ingram said he was supportive of the measure and encourages congregations to set up committees and liaisons with law enforcement. In response to Ms. Keys' questions, Mr. Ingram reported to the Advisory Committee that law enforcement agencies in Mississippi have an investigative plan whenever there is a church fire, hate crime, or civil rights violation. With reference to church fires, after a fire has been reported, the ATF, State fire marshal's office, FBI, Mississippi Highway Patrol, and other responsible agencies divide up the work. The work includes securing the crime scene, conducting interviews, crime lab tests, and roadblocks. Mr. Ingram is of the opinion that the Mississippi investigative plan is working well. When asked by Dr. Ward, he told the Advisory Committee that there are no known organized hate or militia groups active in the State. There is a \$20,000 reward offer for the solving of the Kossuth fires. Money will increase the number of leads provided to law enforcement investigators, he said.

Following Mr. Ingram's statement, the Advisory Committee heard from Dr. Allen Dennis, professor of history at Delta State University. Dr. Dennis provided a historical backdrop on Mississippi and the Delta area, which has been described as the richest soil this side of the Nile Valley. The pre-Civil War maps described the Delta as a swamp; however, after the Civil War a levee system was built, and the land was dried, cleared, and planted. The Delta became the classic plantation aristocracy, a land developed with relatively few fairly wealthy whites and a great many poor blacks with no substantive middle class. Dr. Dennis has seen a great deal of progress in race relations in his last 28 years in the Delta, but it is not what it ought to be, he said. As a minister, he believes that the church ought to be the social organization with a life-changing agenda, an organization that should treat people equally. Yet in the South, as elsewhere, the church is the most conservative and the most segregated of organizations.

The Advisory Committee moved on to hear from Wayne Nicolas, managing editor of the *Bolivar Commercial*, the local newspaper in Cleveland, who stated that his staff has covered the church burnings the same as any other story: They simply try to tell what happened, the best way they can, and if possible why it happened. Mr. Nicholas pointed out that the editorial page of his newspaper campaigned for stricter laws covering hate crimes. Recent editorials, he noted, have focused attention on the point that some of the church fires were motivated by racism and racial hate. The newspaper has issued a call for blacks and whites to come together to put an end to the arsons and to raise up the victimized churches.

In response to Dr. Berry's question about segregation in Cleveland, Mr. Nicholas said that the Cleveland High School is integrated; Eastside High School is all black; and Bell Elementary is mainly black. The magnet school is supposed to be 50-50 black and white students according to Federal guidelines. When asked by Ms. Keys about academies, Mr. Nicholas responded that North Sunflower Academy and Bayou Academy were all-white private schools. When Dr. Berry asked if

there were families who ran the town of Cleveland, Mr. Nicholas responded that despite a rise in the black middle class in the area, there were two major companies in the area, Baxter and Tyson Chicken.

The Advisory Committee moved on to hear from Brian Levin, associate professor of criminal justice at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and director of a new center devoted to the study of hate crimes and extremism. Formerly, Mr. Levin was associate director for legal affairs at Klanwatch. He told the Advisory Committee that there have been over 60 arsons of black churches in the Southeast. He gave the Advisory Committee data indicating that there were 270 active hate groups in 1995 throughout the United States and numerous hate-motivated murders, assaults, arsons, and bombings. Mr. Levin reported that, according to FBI statistics, African Americans remain the most frequent target of hate crimes. He estimates that a hate crime occurs every 15-30 minutes in the United States. Mr. Levin's statement addressed two main areas: the profile of persons most likely to set a church on fire and an assessment of Federal, State, and local law enforcement. Mr. Levin noted that the attention currently given to the church fires is not normally given to hate crimes in the broader sense.

Regarding the profile of church arsonists, Mr. Levin described the southeastern individuals as prejudiced thrill seekers and likely to be a diverse group, not a single hate conspiracy. Although a sizable number will be traditional arsonists and individuals with a more specific rationale for selecting a target, such as personal revenge or covering up another crime, a smaller number will be hardened bigots or hate group members or prejudiced individuals out to settle a score. Mr. Levin added that 95 percent of hate crime offenders are not hardened bigots or members of organized hate groups.

Approximately 50 percent of hate offenses are done by perpetrators 21 years or younger. With regard to other crimes, persons 21 or under represent 26 percent of all types of crime and 34 percent of arsons. Most hate crime offenders are average, unaffiliated, blue-collar white males in their middle teens and twenties who have not achieved much, socially, educationally, or economically.

The church arsonists will likely fit this overall pattern, Mr. Levin continued, with some notable exceptions. Mr. Levin noted that 50 percent of all those arrested for the church fires are young people. He explained that these arsons will involve slightly fewer young offenders and more hardened hatemongers. Five percent will be hardened hate offenders/hate group members. Adults commonly commit hate crimes to scapegoat economic or familial frustration, to protect their families or communities from minorities, or to retaliate for some perceived transgression, he explained. The youth, he said, commit these crimes for validation, excitement, self-identity, personal and sexual insecurity, and a need to embrace a negative stereotype.

Mr. Levin noted that hardened bigots and hate group members may be involved in some of the church fires, but the available research and evidence do not support a centrally orchestrated effort by a single hate group. If hate groups are involved, the attacks are usually in the general region

they reside in rather than part of a conspiracy throughout the whole Southeast. Mr. Levin added that hate groups have a higher percentage in the South and members are likely to live in rural areas.

Regarding the Federal response to the church fires, Mr. Levin noted that some of the laws need revision and that funding for the Community Relations Service of the U.S. Department of Justice should be brought up to its previous level. Additionally, he said, Federal law enforcement agencies and Federal prosecutors must be given proper resources for them to do their jobs. Regarding the response of State law enforcement officials to hate crimes, Mr. Levin told the Advisory Committee that, with the exception of Florida, Virginia, and Texas, the Southeast regions rated the worst nationally. He added that five of the Southern States do not have hate crime laws and those that do rarely enforce them. He also said that the region generally fails to comply with the Hate Crime Statistics Act.

Mr. Levin pointed out that officials at the State and local levels need training, specific policies, better interagency coordination, better community outreach, and specific hate crime procedures. Finally, he noted, each agency should designate an official who would be responsible for hate crime response.

Dr. Berry noted that a law enforcement official who spoke earlier said there were no organized hate groups in Mississippi. She inquired where Mr. Levin received information pointing to hate groups in the State. Based on *Klanwatch* data, Mr. Levin concluded, there is Klan and neo-Nazi activity in Mississippi. While the State has a reporting responsibility for hate crimes, the local reporting of incidents has been negligible, in the single digits or low double digits, he said.

The Advisory Committee next heard from Rev. Dexter D. Brown and Deacon Charles Jones, members of the religious community. Reverend Brown, pastor of the New Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Ruleville, said the history of hostility and hatred was repeating itself. He told the Advisory Committee that his church was set afire on March 20, 1996, and had been vandalized periodically. The church was also burned down in 1966, he said. Regarding the recent church fire and vandalism, Reverend Brown said he felt that the local police and sheriff departments did not provide sufficient protection or arson investigation to deter the perpetrators. The church arson did not get properly investigated until the ATF and FBI entered the picture 3 months after the fire occurred, he said.

Committee Chair Dr. Ward asked Reverend Brown if the lack of law enforcement response was at the State or local level. Reverend Brown said that the fire was reported but the fire department failed to investigate. He said that but for a newspaper account of the fire, no one would have known of the incident other than the congregation. When Mr. Range pressed for more information, Reverend Brown told the Advisory Committee that it was not until the FBI and ATF investigated the fire that the local police department and media became involved. In response to Ms. Keys' question, Reverend Brown said that the Ruleville Police Department and the Sunflower Sheriff's Department did a poor investigation and showed very little interest. Reverend Brown remarked that the local churches did not provide much support for his congregation.



Ms. Keys asked about the congregation's concerns. Reverend Brown said the congregation's concern has been vandalism. The church's outside light is shot out by gunfire on a monthly basis. About a quarter of a mile from the church, the river bridge is a known hangout for persons who drink, fight, and eventually target the church for damage. Whites have been seen at the bridge during these activities. The bridge is covered with graffiti that has included a swastika and the letters KKK.

Dr. Berry asked about race relations in the area. According to Reverend Brown, race relations in Ruleville generally amount to the African American community interacting with the white community at a business level. Socially, African Americans keep to themselves. Reverend Brown told the Advisory Committee that a white member of his church has been chided by other whites for attending the New Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church. Reverend Brown noted that there have been no open acts of hostility or violence in Ruleville.

Charles L. Jones is a deacon at New Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church. He told the Advisory Committee that the Ruleville church has been vandalized several times by whites. Deacon Jones said that one of the vandals has made restitution monetarily and was incarcerated for the windows he broke. Deacon Jones said that he does not know who started the fire and therefore would not lay blame to Ruleville.

Mr. Jones told the Advisory Committee that the church's rural location made it an easy target for vandals. He added that although the sheriff's department patrolled the area, the church was not provided with protection. The church is going to move into town, Deacon Jones continued, into a building that was brought and is being renovated by the deacon and his brother. Responding to Committee Chair Ward's question, Mr. Jones said that they do not have a big racial problem in the South. He gets along with whites, blacks, and Jews. When Mr. Foster asked if the area was segregated, Mr. Jones said that housing was segregated. He closed by stating that he enjoyed the town, his work, and the area.

The Advisory Committee then heard from more members of Federal law enforcement. Alfred Moreton, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Mississippi, located in Oxford, and Brad Pigott, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi, appeared before the Committee.

Mr. Moreton agreed with other law enforcement officials that there is no comparison between the current church burnings and the ones that occurred in the 1960s. He said the atmosphere is different. The response of the community is different. The response and attitude of law enforcement is totally different. With an apparent reference to the media publicity on church fires, Mr. Moreton cautioned the Advisory Committee to keep an open mind and not to rush to conclude that the motivation is racial hatred. The facts and the solutions to the crimes are needed first before motives are determined. However, he noted that there is a fairly tenable hypothesis of racial motivation for the burnings in Kossuth, and it is still being entertained in the investigation.

Mr. Moreton reported that five churches in the northern district have burned over the period going back to 1992. The two church fires in Kossuth have received an extraordinary amount of investigative attention compared to the three previous Mississippi church fires. As of the date of the forum, he said, there have been no convictions for church fires in the northern district. Mr. Moreton does not think that it can be assumed that all the fires are connected or that there is a conspiracy or that there is one motivation for any of them. He told the Advisory Committee if the fires were racially motivated then they will be prosecuted under the appropriate statutes. If the motive is otherwise, then another statute will be used as basis for prosecution.

Mr. Range asked about Federal law enforcement investigation into the five fires. Mr. Moreton responded that there have been coordinated responses between ATF and FBI agents. He admitted that none of the fires have been solved. Mr. Moreton told the Advisory Committee that it was important to remember that Federal investigative agencies have limited jurisdiction and funds and cannot be held responsible to respond to every fire. He urged that the fires not be construed as conspiratorial until proven by prosecution.

When questioned by Ms. Keys about the reporting and prosecution of hate crimes, Mr. Moreton said the U.S. attorney's office prosecuted a cross burning case and noted that such prosecution was routine. He noted that the incident did not result in any injuries or damage to property. In recent years, he noted, the civil rights violations have been mainly police brutality-type cases or cases at the State penitentiary against prison guards. In response to Ms. Keys' question, Mr. Moreton said that hate crimes are investigated by the FBI. When asked by Dr. Berry, Mr. Moreton said he was not aware of the KKK or swastika graffiti connected to the Ruleville church burning.

Dr. Berry asked Mr. Moreton if he had a task force consisting of ATF, FBI, and marshals under his direction. Mr. Moreton replied that in late May or early June a task force was formed consisting of himself, ATF, FBI, the U.S. marshal, a civil rights division attorney from the Department of Justice, on-ground investigators, and ministers of affected churches. The task force meets when necessary, once a week or every 10 days. The task force of 50 agents also includes highway patrol officers, sheriff's officers, and the State fire marshals.

Brad Pigott, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi, located in Jackson, told the Committee of two different hate crime cases where there were prosecutions and convictions. In 1993 three white persons burned two churches on the same night within adjoining counties on the anniversary of Dr. King's death. The FBI investigation was immediate, with confessions and convictions on Federal charges. In the second case, two white males were convicted of a Federal hate crime of firebombing the home of an interracial couple living in a predominantly white neighborhood.

When asked if there were any active investigation of church fires, Mr. Pigott replied that since 1990, eight African American churches, four white churches, and two biracial churches have been set afire. Mr. Pigott spoke to the Committee about his efforts to coordinate investigations with the State attorney general's office and Federal agencies. He said he has spoken with pastors of affected

churches to determine if the ministers are satisfied with the progress of the investigative work. In reply to Dr. Berry's question about whether insurance companies are discriminating against burned black churches (policy cancellations or refusal to pay damages), Mr. Pigott said he had not received any complaints. If there were complaints, he said, he would certainly take a look at the matter.

On the status of race relations, Jacqueline Morris, a resident of Cleveland, who spoke at the end of the forum's first session, agreed with those who said the Delta region is the most unchanged place since the Civil War. Ms. Morris recounted the experience of a family who wished to build a home on the west side of Cleveland. Their house was burned three times, twice while they were building and once after they moved in. They decided not to stay. In Cleveland (Bolivar County), the east side is black and the west side is white, she said. The school system in Cleveland is segregated, Ms. Morris continued. Cleveland has three high schools and all have very small class sizes. Bayou Academy is all white, Eastside High School is all black, and Cleveland High School is predominantly white.

Ms. Morris mentioned her friendship with a white woman coworker and the negative reactions they received for socializing after work hours. Their coworkers, who had known them both for years, thought it was okay to talk and be friends at work, but they had problems because they socialized together. She stated that the reason there are no race problems in Cleveland is because everyone knows their place and a lot of people do not bother to cross the line.

With the statement of Ms. Morris the Advisory Committee ended the community forum and reconvened the following morning at the same venue. On the second day, the Advisory Committee heard from discussants who represented the local community, local officials, the congressional representative, and the Community Relations Service.

Charles Buckner, deacon of the New Mt. Zion Church, discovered the church fire on Wednesday, March 20, 1996, the second day after the church had burned, while he was doing maintenance work on the church. Deacon Buckner said his church had experienced petty vandalism, but the fire left the congregation devastated emotionally and financially. The most shocking thing he saw when he entered the church was evidence that someone took the Bible and used it to start the fire in the house of the Lord. The congregation and good neighbors pulled together with the remodeling of church's interior and within a month's time, the church was reopened. Mr. Buckner said he did not know who burned the church, but it would have to be a real low down sick person, sick in the head, to burn a church. He did not think it was a racial incident. Deacon Buckner mentioned the disruption of services by those who drink, shoot, and party at the bridge.

Jacqueline Buckner, the director of the church choir, agreed with her husband that the church burning was not racial because there are good relationships in Ruleville. Although the church had been vandalized on a number of occasions, Ms. Buckner said that the congregation was not discouraged. She does not feel that people are still living in Jim Crow times. Ms. Buckner told the Advisory Committee that she and Mr. Buckner work for the Sunflower County Board of Supervisors.

When asked by Mr. Range about law enforcement response to the fires, Deacon Buckner said the fire and police department came right after he called them. He said they took pictures of the scene. He surmised that because Ruleville is a small town, the law enforcement departments lack the resources needed to investigate the fires. Responding to Ms. Keys' questions about the receipt of financial assistance, Ms. Buckner said that the church had plans to move into town because of the repeated vandalism. Both Mr. and Mrs. Buckner spoke to their friends, church member Edgar Donohoe, and president of the Chamber of Commerce Paul McCreary, about financial help for the church. Ms. Buckner said that after speaking with Mr. McCreary the church was able to get a loan for rebuilding efforts. Regarding the rebuilding, Mr. Buckner said the hired help and the church members helped to quicken the pace.

Replying to a question on the status of race relations in Ruleville, Ms. Buckner felt that blacks and whites should be able to sit down together and talk about the problems. The neighborhood she lives in is integrated and people get along and help each other. A biracial committee in Ruleville might be workable, but in Sunflower County as a whole, it might not work as well because of the distances.

Edgar Donohoe is president of the Board of Supervisors of Sunflower County and has been on the board for 14 years. The city of Ruleville is in his district. Mr. Donohoe told the Advisory Committee that he was reelected to the position in a voting district with 64.7 percent black voters. With regard to the racist graffiti on the bridge, Mr. Donohoe said that Charles Buckner, a road foreman in charge of maintaining the bridge, had painted the bridge on a number of occasions, but the graffiti keeps reappearing. Regarding the vandalism of churches in rural Sunflower County, Mr. Donohoe thinks that the acts are done by dopeheads and alcoholics seeking things to pawn.

Mr. Donohoe said that contrary to previous statements made to the Advisory Committee, Ruleville is not segregated except for a low-income housing complex in town. He said that Mr. and Mrs. Buckner were the first African Americans to integrate their neighborhood. Mr. Donohoe said he does not think there is organized prejudice in Ruleville and added that race relations have progressed through the efforts of an integrated local chamber of commerce. The Rotary Club has issued invitations for blacks to join and continues to work toward that goal.

Mr. Jenkins asked what can be done to reach across racial lines. If there are problems in race relations, Mr. Donohoe said, then the solution must come from the local level, not outside advisors. Mr. Donohoe told the Advisory Committee there was a biracial committee in Indianola, Mississippi. He stressed that north and south Sunflower County handle their issues separately. Mr. Jenkins asked Mr. Donohoe to consider the fact that the history of clubs excluding blacks may make them reluctant to join. Mr. Donohoe told the Advisory Committee that race relations still has a long way to go. He said the economy is the area's biggest problem. Washington could help with jobs, Mr. Donohoe said.

Paul McCreary is the current president of the Ruleville Chamber of Commerce and president of

Planter's Bank. Mr. McCreary told the Advisory Committee that race relations are fine in Ruleville, but there is always 5 percent of blacks and whites who think that things are not right. In 99.9 percent of the church fires, Mr. McCreary thinks, race is not a factor. He stated that those behind the church fires are high on drugs and are looking for items to sell.

Ms. Keyes asked about the area's economy. With respect to economics, Mr. McCreary said the Ruleville banks have about \$43 million in deposits, and he estimated that 20 percent of the people control 85 percent of the deposits. He also said that homeownership and good jobs are key to a good community. The city depends on Sunflower County for its economic development efforts. Mr. McCreary explained that minimum wage jobs make it difficult for families to survive and said that the need for higher wages was a national problem. When asked by Mr. Lott if there were youth services, Mr. McCreary said he did not know but added that it was likely that the churches had youth programs. Mr. McCreary told the Advisory Committee that his children attended private academies north of Ruleville where there are African American students.

The Advisory Committee next heard from Irma Carmichael, a field representative for U.S. Congressman Bennie Thompson. In the prepared statement read by Ms. Carmichael, Representative Thompson stated that he was seriously concerned about the current church arsons, which reminded him of the burnings in the sixties. The Congressman mentioned evidence of hate crimes, Jim Crow, and the destructive forces of racism and intolerance in America. Although the law enforcement officials concluded they have found no evidence of the crimes being racially motivated, Representative Thompson said he does not believe that the church fires are coincidental. Representative Thompson reported that he has received numerous pieces of hate mail that have been attributed to the Klan and other hate groups. He cosponsored legislation that allows Federal involvement when religious property is damaged for racial or ethnic reasons rather than just religious reasons. The law also allows persons injured in church burnings to receive compensation under another Federal law and doubles prison penalties from 10 to 20 years. Finally, the law will allow charitable organizations to apply for loans from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to rebuild destroyed churches. At the close of the statement, Ms. Carmichael offered her personal view and said that she did not believe that the fires were racially motivated. Ms. Carmichael is a resident of Mound Bayou, Mississippi.

William Whitcomb from the Community Relations Service, Department of Justice, recently was assigned to a special deployment team on church burnings. He said the mission of CRS in this arena is to create a good working relationship between law enforcement agencies and the minority community affected by the church burnings. Additionally, the agency is attempting to prevent future church burnings by working in various communities to improve relations.

Mr. Whitcomb told the Advisory Committee that there have been 145 suspicious church fires between January 1, 1995, and June 25, 1996. Of the 73 African American churches set afire, Mr. Whitcomb said the majority were in the Southern States. CRS has been requested to assist the National Church Arson Task Force in the gathering and dissemination of current, accurate information on church burnings. Mr. Whitcomb noted that the Department of Justice has made

\$225,000 available for the deployment of 47 CRS staff to assist the national task force and to do community tension assessments of each community where black churches have been burned or desecrated. Three CRS staff members will work on national management, four on regional supervision, and there will be 20 conciliation specialists. The agency will attempt to improve racial relations through partnerships and coalitions.

Mr. Whitcomb pointed out that the CRS budget had been cut by 70 percent for fiscal year 1996. To respond to the escalation of racial tensions and church fires, the agency needs additional funds, he said, and CRS must be proactive in responding to tense situations.

Committee Chair Ward asked about the CRS's planned activities for Mississippi. Mr. Whitcomb said an examination of the allegations of denials of insurance, meetings with community folks, and bridging the gap between community and law enforcement are planned for Tennessee and Mississippi. Mr. Range asked about CRS preventative measures. Mr. Whitcomb noted that it is important that law enforcement officials report instances of bias crimes so that his agency can then track race relations trends. In the past, CRS has provided training to FBI agents on how to respond to hate crimes. He thinks that law enforcement officials are not very sensitive to the issue of bias crimes. In many instances, crimes are treated as routine without any consideration of racial motivation. In response to Ms. Keys' request, Mr. Whitcomb said he would make the 1994 CRS report available to the Advisory Committee.

Mr. Lott asked if CRS investigated any of the 147 fires. Mr. Whitcomb replied that because of the 70 percent reduction in the agency, the absence of staff support, and with the downsized staff from 7 to 3 for the coverage of four States, none of the 147 churches has been reviewed. He explained further that CRS is responsible for looking at the underlying or systemic causes for the nationwide spread of the fires. He added that all forms of bias are being examined and information from the Anti-Defamation League, Center for Democratic Renewal, Klanwatch, and other groups that collect data on hate crimes are being examined. Mr. Whitcomb told the Advisory Committee that the response of CRS to the fires does not preclude the law enforcement officials from carrying out their responsibilities.

When Mr. Lott questioned whether the motive of religious hatred was vigorously being pursued, Mr. Whitcomb said that he was certain that religious animus was aggressively being addressed by the Department of Justice. Kenneth Cook, from the Denver CRS office, explained further that CRS' jurisdiction is limited to race, color, or national origin. When the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was expanded to include age, gender, religion, and disability, the CRS mandate was never changed to include those protected classes. Mr. Cook added that if religious animosity is being examined, then it will be reviewed by an agency with appropriate authority.

Following Mr. Whitcomb's statement, the community forum was opened to the public for remarks.

Darrell Johnson is an alderman for the city of Mound Bayou and the pastor of the Walk in Faith Church. He said that there is racism directed at Mound Bayou, an all-black town in Bolivar

County. Reverend Johnson said that banks will not make loans to businesses or potential home owners in the town. He said that racism is based on fear that has been built over the years since the days of slavery and passed on through the generations. Reverend Johnson noted that churches have a segregated hour (on Sunday) in this country and in the Mississippi Delta.

George Whitten, Jr., a member of the Grace Church in Greenwood, told the Advisory Committee that what black and white Christians want from the government simply to enforce the criminal laws. Arson is a crime and it is the job of local and State government to investigate and punish those crimes. With reference to the purpose of the forum, Mr. Whitten said the source of racial hostility has already been identified and exposed. The source is in each human heart. He talked about going beyond the government's work and to use the message, the gospel of Christ, to resolve the hatred in the hearts of men.

Wayne Allen, a resident of Cleveland, said that without hard evidence in the recent rash of church burnings, a great deal of damage is being done by assuming that the church burnings are racially motivated. His reading of statistics of black church fires does not support the racially motivated theory. Dr. Allen has read that churches are burned for insurance purposes, for vandalism, coverup for theft, or for sacrilegious activities.

Owen Brooks is a resident of Greenville and works for the Delta Ministry. He suggested that the serious issue of church burnings in Mississippi must be approached from the standpoint of history. Mississippians have to differentiate between break-ins and church burnings. In church break-ins, valuables get stolen and insurance companies have to replace them. Mr. Brooks does not think the quality of life in Ruleville is better than it was 30 years ago. He said that more information about the church burnings would come from the community if the Advisory Committee's meeting had been held in their neighborhood. He urged the Committee to continue to seek the truth.

Ora M. Butler, a resident of Cleveland, expressed her concerns about race relations to the Committee. She stated that Cleveland basically has two separate school systems, apart from the white academy. School integration in Cleveland is done by a system of school choice, with whites and blacks able to cross the tracks to schools on the other side, which is seldom done, she said. Ms. Butler said there are obvious differences in the east side and west side schools in such areas as books and other resources. She said she does not believe the church burnings are a conspiracy but in many cases a passionate expression of feelings of people in our country today resulting from the political climate.



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