



# The MISSION Of MARIAN WRIGHT

BY **PONCHITTA PIERCE**

Constantly on the job, whether visiting impoverished Mississippians in Sawmill Quarters (left), or researching law case in library of Jackson office (below), Marian Wright is a potent force for civil rights in nation's most hostile state.

## RIGHTS CRUSADE IN MISSISSIPPI

about by the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, those in the Black Belt are nearly destitute. Alabama has some 980,721 Negroes and only 19 Negro lawyers practicing in the state; Georgia, more than one million with 30; Louisiana, about one million with 38 and South Carolina, more than 829,000 with 31. "Those states are bad off," Marian notes. "Yet you can find an occasional oasis. But the whole state of Mississippi is fouled up." Although she describes Mississippi as "the most exciting, at the same time most depressing, yet most hopeful state in America," she recognizes that "anyone who goes to Mississippi and is not afraid, ain't sane. Anyone who comes down here should have a healthy case of paranoia."

With names like Emmett Till, Charles Mack Parker, Medgar Evers and the trio of James Chaney, Mickey Schwerner and Andy Goodman reading like a litany to the martyred, while the memory of James Meredith's fighting to enter "Ole Miss" is still fresh in the minds of many, she adds, "I don't think anyone in Mississippi is not frightened at some time. You never know when some idiot is going to break and try to shoot at someone. But you can't give in to the fear."

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Auteursrechtelijk beschermd materiaal





Marian and colleague, Henry Aronson, 31-year-old Yale-trained attorney, are responsible for handling all cases in Mississippi for NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. As legal intern with unit commonly called "Inc. Fund," her salary and expenses are paid by New York office where she trained for year under Director Jack Greenberg before going South.

## MARIAN WRIGHT CONTINUED

The real reason why Marian Wright turned to Mississippi when most people are trying to leave behind the poverty and demagogues, stems from her belief that "one should respond to need and people with the tools have more responsibility to act in a socially useful way." She first went to Mississippi while a student at Yale. "I saw those poor people there risking everything they had for a change. They had only their wills and their bodies. I felt if they could do so much with nothing, the least one with some skills could do was to try and help." Once a student at the universities of Geneva and Paris (as a Merrill Scholar), later a participant in a study-tour of Russia and eastern Europe (on a Lisle Fellowship) and in 1962, a member of the "Operations Crossroads" in Africa, Marian flirted for a long time with the idea of a career in Russian studies or international relations.

"I do things because I'm angry," she says of her final decision to become a lawyer, "and I was angry with what was happening in the South. I knew darn well 19th century Russian literature wasn't going to help me down there." For the longest, however, she wasn't sure law was the answer either. Even while at Yale Law School on a John Hay Whitney Fellowship she remembers "it was hell trying to concentrate" on her studies. "I couldn't relate any of it to what was going on in the world around me." She felt guilty about "wasting people's time and money," but she was encouraged by a professor who used to tell her:

"Once you've decided to be a lawyer, you will be a good one." Strongly influenced by Albert Camus and Tolstoy's philosophy that the Kingdom of God is within each person, Marian saw the greatest motivation and need in Mississippi. Typically, hanging on her kitchen wall in Jackson is a copy of Robert Frost's poem *The Road Not Taken*.

Now a veteran in the Civil Rights Movement, Marian got her "first real taste" in 1960 when she was arrested for taking part in a sit-in demonstration in Atlanta while still a student at Spelman College. An early participant in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Northern student movement, she was a member of the student group that coordinated all civil rights demonstrations in Atlanta.

Ever since the young lawyer moved into Mississippi two years ago, she has been handling cases for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (commonly known as the Inc. Fund), and working with the three local cooperating attorneys.

Recognized by the Mississippi Bar and already admitted to practice in Washington, D. C., Marian, along with her 31-year-old colleague, Henry Aronson, is responsible for all of the Fund's legal activities in the state. Dividing the work load between herself and Aronson, a former corporate lawyer in Connecticut, she handles a statewide docket of hundreds of cases ranging from school desegregation suits (21 in litigation now), equal employment and equal welfare payments for Negroes, to integration of hospitals, restaurants and other public facilities. Particular emphasis is given to school desegregation. About 1,000

**Other Negro lawyers** in Jackson cooperate with Marian, who meets here with (l. to r.), Jack Young, Jess Brown and Carsie Hall, in Young's office. Of six Negroes practicing in state, five take civil rights cases, while one steers clear of them. Youngest Negro lawyer in state, Marian passed bar exam after last minute cramming.







**Not one to waste moment,** Marian dictates letter to secretary, Mrs. Elmer Taylor, on street, while James Abram, law clerk in their office, looks on. Below, she and Aronson debark from small plane of sort they frequently rent to cover cases in all parts of state. Henry has private pilot's license; Marian is studying for hers.





## MARIAN WRIGHT CONTINUED

Mississippi Negroes (approximately 3.5 per cent of the Negro pupils) now are attending public school classes with whites.

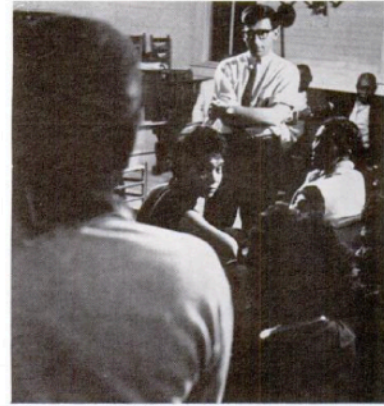
Last January, *Mademoiselle* magazine recognized the work Marian was doing and named her "one of the four most exciting young women in the country, each of whom has brought to her field an outstanding degree of dedication and skill." Other "merit award" winners presented with the coveted medallion were 24-year-old writer Anne Tyler, 19-year-old actress Lesley Ann Warren and 19-year-old ballerina Suzanne Farrell.

Around the time Marian was preparing to fly from Jackson to New York City to accept the award, a case came up involving a Negro father in Carthage, Miss., who had enrolled his six-year-old daughter Debora in a formerly all-white school. Subsequently he was fired from his job with a lumber company, threatened with eviction by his white landlords and finally, while Christmas shopping last year, struck from behind, beaten and then—in keeping with Mississippi mentality—arrested for

the office, in court, out "in the field" visiting plaintiffs, back in her office for appointments and then out again for a round of meetings covering anything from a local Head Start program to the problems plantation workers are having because they enrolled their children in desegregated schools.

"Down here a lawyer has more than legal responsibilities," she explains. "After you get the schools integrated, you're still faced with parents who don't make enough money to buy clothes to send their kids to school or who are more worried about where the next meal is coming from than being able to sit in a white restaurant downtown. You've got to understand the personal problems of the folk down here first, then you worry about the professional ones. Here you never know when one step forward actually means four backwards. Granted you have victories—many of them superficial, like being able to eat in any restaurant or staying in any hotel you want. But the fundamental problems are poverty, jobs, education and housing. You can't change people's lives on marching and court suits alone."

When Marian arrived in Mississippi in the summer of 1964, civil



At meeting on school desegregation in Lexington, Miss., Marian listens (left), while two civil rights workers, Sue and Henry Lorenzi, answer questions from floor, then takes notes as she and Henry hear complaints of parents with children in formerly all-white schools. Below, she joins others in singing of *We Shall Overcome*.



assault and battery. Although Marian "had looked forward to this honor in behalf of the young women who have contributed so much to the Mississippi Freedom Movement," she wired *Mademoiselle's* Editor-in-chief Betsy Blackwell, saying she would not be able to come for the presentation. She would be in court that day representing Debora's father and fighting once again a tradition of segregation that has kept Mississippi a "closed society" ever since it reacted to Reconstruction. People who know Marian were not surprised by her selfless action. They simply chalked it up as another testimony to her courage and commitment to the movement. For while many hate the thought of her practicing in Mississippi, they have to admire her guts.

A fast-talking legal whiz who can argue as calmly in front of Mississippi's Southern District Judge Harold Cox as in a mock court, Marian contradicts the popular image of the successful young lawyer: she doesn't worry about clothes or how many strands of hair are out of place, she doesn't earn a lot of money and she doesn't spend most of the day behind a desk or in court. Instead, her morning generally begins at 7 a.m. and before the day ends at midnight or later, she has been in

rights were being challenged on all fronts: in the courts by hard-core segregationists, in the counties by trigger-happy and "nigger-hating" whites and in the jails by lawmen often quicker with their fists than with their minds. In a burst of idealistic commitment, hundreds of white students answered S.O.S. calls from the now defunct Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) to get Negroes politically organized and registered to vote. Many of the "Northern agitators," however, soon landed in jail, mostly on trumped-up charges, without counsel and bail. Lawyers throughout the country flew to their defense. Indispensable but often inexperienced in civil rights litigation, they soon had to return to their private practices, leaving behind them hundreds of cases pending on the Mississippi docket.

Today Marian and Aronson are still arguing more than 100 cases resulting from the COFO Summer Project, in addition to their present caseload which includes a number of affirmative actions against enforcement of some Mississippi laws. With only one qualified secretary and a law clerk working with them in the dingy seven-room quarters maintained by the Inc. Fund in the heart of Jackson's Negro district,

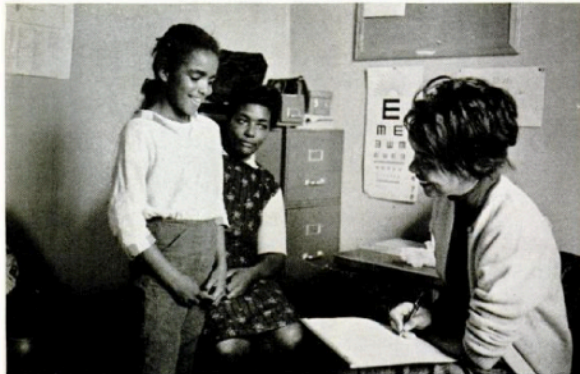




**Child Development Group** of Mississippi, which operates Head Start centers throughout state, is pet project of Marian. She is secretary of its executive board, serving with (l. to r.), Martin N. Cohn, Rev. James McRee, Dan Beittel and John Mudd.



**Representative of "New Negro"** is this 13-year-old student, Bradie Mae Keys, who explains drawing attacking plantation life and Uncle Tomism, as Marian visits Head Start center at Mount Beulah, educational and recreational complex near Jackson.



**One of dozen children** attending desegregated schools in Carthage area is Hazel Harvey, eight. When Marian asked what school she went to, third-grader said, "The white school." Marian smiled, commented, "It ain't anymore, honey. You're in it."



**Twin boys who integrated school** in Canton, Miss., are honored with their buddies at impromptu party featuring ice cream and cake. Young lawyer has a way with kids, spends considerable time touring various Head Start centers to check on progress.

## MARIAN WRIGHT CONTINUED

it's remarkable that anything gets done. But everyday briefs are written, suits filed, cases argued and legal victories won.

Sometimes the small staff is aided by the cooperating attorneys in Mississippi and those flown in at the eleventh hour from the Inc. Fund's New York office. Most of the time, however, it is Marian Wright or Henry Aronson in front of the judge showing cause why civil rights workers arrested while distributing handbills urging Negroes to register to vote can not be charged with "littering," or why 300 Negro students suspended from their Issaquena County schools for wearing freedom buttons and charged with "disturbing the school" should be reinstated. Many of the charges brought against local Negroes and white civil rights workers are senseless and unconstitutional. Designed more to harass than to enforce any law, most of the charges can't survive on appeal, but they manage to keep Marian and the Inc. Fund from more important work.

As a lawyer in Mississippi, Marian functions with the belief that educational and employment barriers militate against integration in the state's 82 counties just as strongly as any legal ones. Consequently, in addition to her official duties and related community projects, she spends an amazing amount of time in the field visiting sharecroppers in the rich Delta, workers on plantations, or families living in the hills with only cows and cotton for their neighbors. When she visits the farmers, she asks how many bales of cotton they picked and how much money they got for it. One father of eight, who had been forced to leave a plantation in Sunflower County along with some 65 other families because of their civil rights activities and automation, told her he worked 25 acres last year, brought in 23 bales and got \$215, after expenses. "Can you imagine, supporting eight people off that," Marian responded, turning to fellow lawyer Aronson who had accompanied her to Mount Beulah where the families were being housed in facilities provided by the Delta Ministry of the National Council of Churches. The implications are clearer when one realizes that last year cotton sold for around 29 cents a pound and there are about 500 pounds in most bales, according to United States standards. To date some 68 per cent of Mississippi's Negroes still live in rural areas and about 40 per cent of the Negro-operated farms are still sharecropped, the tenant farmers still being ruthlessly exploited.

As agriculture becomes more technical and more laborers unemployed, the Negro's economic plight continues to plummet. Marian is now discussing with local leaders the possibility of organizing a moshav (Israeli type of limited cooperative farm) in the state. "It could be set up on a former plantation and would experiment in agricultural production, rural industrialization, vocational training and education," she explains. To find out first-hand about moshavism, Marian spent two months in Israel early this year on a Ford Foundation Grant.

Next to economics, education is the firebrand's big concern, one no doubt inherited from her father, who pastored Shiloh Baptist Church in Bennettsville until his death in 1954. "As long as I can remember, daddy always stressed education," says Marian. "He would have me read with him for hours from books out of his library. 'Constructive stuff' he used to call it. And I can still remember the days he would gather my three brothers, my sister and me in the car and shepherd us around to hear any speaker he thought worthwhile. Daddy was the only one in his family to get educated and he was determined we would all be, too." Marian was with her father shortly before he died. In the ambulance his last words to her were, "Don't let anything get between you and your education."

Marian knows getting Negroes educated in Mississippi is no easy matter. As Roy Self, a middle-aged white Baptist minister who was recently forced to part with his flock in Yazoo County, puts it: "No matter how much a white person claims he loves 'my nigger,' he doesn't want him to be educated. He thinks a smart-aleck Negro won't be dependent and humble anymore." If Negroes in Mississippi must be educated, whites are horrified at the thought of it being done in the same school with their children.

Indications of the fight Mississippians intend to wage before they give in were seen during the annual convention of the Mississippi Education Association held in Jackson last March. "Shook-up superintendents are still shaking their heads over the 'Revised Statement of Policies for School Desegregation Plans,'" wrote one staffer in The



Clarion-Ledger. He then described one school superintendent as saying that although pupil desegregation had its traumatic aspects, it was "child's play" compared to staff desegregation, which includes teachers, clerks, janitors, cooks—everybody.

Such statements anger Marian and law partner Aronson. But the pair is even more disturbed by "the uneducated judgment and lack of courage" shown by officials from the Office of Education in Washington, D. C., "who buckle under to white school officials in their resistance to substantial school desegregation." She cites the case of a top education official from Washington (a Negro) who in a recent meeting with Mississippi's school superintendents on compliance took such a weak stand on teacher desegregation he drew a standing ovation. "They were so pleased," Marian says sarcastically, "that one superintendent was heard to say, 'This is the best nigger we've had down here in a long time.'" Criticizing law without enforcement, she warns, "Until the federal government has the will and staff to implement desegregation in schools, the Negro child will remain the victim of white school boards' delays and evasions of the law."

While cases involving plaintiffs and clear-cut issues test Marian's



"Out in the field," Marian is warmly greeted by (l. to r.), Mrs. Minnie Lewis, Mrs. Dovie Hudson, Mrs. Winson Hudson of Carthage. She makes it a point to seek out those who might be hesitant to come to her in Jackson with news of harassment.

mettle, ones that seem to move her most, at least emotionally, are those focusing on individual families who dared to register their children in formerly all-white schools.

One evening local residents in Holmes County met to discuss the problems they were having after some 189 Negro children in the area attempted to enroll in white schools. Only 100 were legally able to gain admittance, but immediately whites boycotted the grades being integrated and set up private schools in churches. Schools are being desegregated in Mississippi under "freedom of choice" plans. Theoretically a child can apply and expect admission to any school of his choice in his district. Negroes, however, are often challenged in exercising their freedom of choice because of "bad manners," "poor records," "bad character." So far, Negroes in Holmes County have only succeeded in integrating grades one to four. Parents complained to Marian that their children were being treated harshly and harassed by white teachers (even though the pupils were getting a better education under them), were forced to walk sometimes two to three miles to school in the rain when a white school bus could easily pick them up, and were getting Fs, some of them deserved, most not.

Mrs. Lillie Walden, the tall, black and handsome chairman of the local Freedom Democratic Party (FDP), related at the meeting how a teacher told one of her children he couldn't come to school because his shoes were dirty. "Well now, if your child had to walk two miles to school I don't think his shoes would be clean, either," she countered. "But we licked that one, too. I bought my kids some polish and told them to clean their shoes as soon as they got to school."

Despite the hardships, parents prefer their children in the integrated schools. Negro schools traditionally have suffered from weaker programs, less adequate facilities, larger classes, less trained and less paid teachers, a higher teacher-pupil ratio and lower expenditures per child.

In many instances where it is hard to prove legally that injustice is being done, Marian's greatest contribution to the movement in Mississippi seems to be the hope and inspiration she offers the local people. They trust her, respect her legal ability and appreciate her genuine concern for their plight. Describing her as a "profound person" and "no phony," the Rev. Allen Johnson, pastor of Jackson's Pratt Methodist Church explains, "Marian is dedicated. She could do much better elsewhere, both socially and legally. We know her life is in danger. She's not from Mississippi but we claim her as our own. She belongs to the New South."

To many Negro Mississippians the mere fact that Marian risks night rides through counties where shooting and burning are still more fact than fiction is proof enough that she identifies with them and regards their problems as important as any legal work she might have waiting.

"The worst thing these people live with," Marian says, "is fear. They're afraid that their homes might be burned or they'll be killed or their jobs lost. Even more devastating, these people know that most of the time the violators and killers won't even be punished. One has to understand this. Until the federal government takes strong and persistent action in protecting persons against violence and harassment, we aren't going to be able to overcome this fear."

Often a strong local leader accomplishes more than the federal government. She recalls the time when the Rev. James McRee came to Madison County from nearby Laurel in 1963 and started asking how many people in the county were registered to vote. "I frightened them to death," McRee later told Marian. The young minister, now chairman of the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM), the local Head Start program, saw his church membership dwindle from nearly 200 to about 30 persons. Whites would harass him with threatening phone calls while Negroes, out of fear, also fought against him. One Sunday he told his congregation, "You bastards, take your money and go to hell together." Shocked at first, the Negroes learned they couldn't force him out and finally joined him, forming the Madison County Movement. Outnumbering whites in the area two to one, they now boast one of the best politically organized counties in the state.

While Marian herself, in attacking Mississippi's status quo, might not be afraid, she is cautious. She travels a minimum at night and rarely alone. She can spot sheriff cars a mile ahead and behind. She also makes it a habit to keep her gas tank full and the inside lights off.

Although an amalgam of civil rights groups have opened up some 30 counties with varying degrees of success, there are still some 50 in Mississippi where no civil rights organizations or workers have penetrated. In some places, like Yazoo County, even SNCC, considered the most militant, won't venture, Marian notes, her sigh indicating the amount of work yet to be done. But despite segregationists avid attempts to thwart actions that might expose Mississippi to the modern world, Marian and the Inc. Fund have made legal dents.

In *Guyot vs. Mississippi*, approximately 800 persons were arrested last June as they attempted to march on the State Capitol in protest of the legislature's action against Negro voting. An injunction was brought attacking the city of Jackson's policy of instant arrest in all protest demonstrations. The injunction was granted by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals and for the first time established the right to march peacefully in Jackson.

In *Clyde Harvey vs. Mississippi*, a Negro resident in Carthage, Leake County, who was active in the COFO Summer Project and had opened his house to white and Negro workers, was arrested "for possessing intoxicating liquor." Mississippi is the only state in the nation that still prohibits the sale of liquor. A few days after the party, police searched Harvey's house while he was away and found two cans of beer. Although Harvey was arrested, convicted and jailed, he was never tried





At country store in Carthage, Miss., Marian makes herself at home and enjoys bologna sandwich with residents she fondly describes as "strong people," (l. to r.), Mrs. Winson Hudson, Mrs. Minnie Lewis and Mrs. Dovie Hudson. Mrs. Lewis is wife of man young lawyer stayed behind to defend on day she was to be honored by Mademoiselle.



Friend to those of all ages, Marian accepts advice from Carthage's senior citizens, 82-year-old Effarilla McKee (with scarf), and 83-year-old "Aunt Emma" Kirkland, who tells "youngster" she can live long too, "just walk a lot and eat plenty fish."

## MARIAN WRIGHT CONTINUED

in court. Arguing in appeal that Harvey's rights under the 14th Amendment had been breached, the Inc. Fund won the case, establishing a person's right to counsel in misdemeanors.

History has shown that it is pretty hard to get a fair civil rights trial in Mississippi state courts. As a result Marian and the Inc. Fund have removed about 90 per cent of all civil rights cases to federal courts. Recently she and Aronson set still another precedent in *Dilworth vs. Riner*: the right to enjoin state court prosecutions arising under Title II of the Civil Rights Act.

A human dynamo who averages four to five hours sleep a night and gets most of her fuel from huge breakfasts of grits, sausage, eggs and coffee with three lumps of sugar, Marian charges up everyone around her. "She demands the best of herself and of the people working with her," says secretary Elmer Taylor while a former roommate notes, "When she has something to do, she drives herself to collapse. It may be late but it does get done."

Not one to avoid work, Marian does her legal job and finds time for yet another project, Mississippi's Head Start program which began last summer under a \$1.4 million grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity. A member of the bi-racial executive board, she passes hours in committee meetings and many others in visiting Head Start centers which operate in some 20 counties and involve approximately 10,000 pre-schoolers. Marian regards the Head Start program (organized under the Child Development Group of Mississippi) as crucial "to the development of Negro children in the state and involvement of parents in the educational process" and guards closely against anything that might tie it up. Recently, when Mississippi Senator John Stennis initiated a much-publicized move to get anti-poverty funds withdrawn from the program (denouncing CDGM's civil rights connections and charging \$500,000 financial 'discrepancies'), CDGM took some 50 little girls and boys, put them on a train to Washington with tickets purchased from volunteer contributions and marched them up to Congressman Adam Clayton Powell's Hearing Committee. The trip saved the day and within a week the Head Start program was funded for an additional \$5.6 million





**Family thrown off plantation** after 12 years confides woes in dormitory refuge at Mount Beulah. Though future is uncertain, Casey Robinson, 52, knows it couldn't be worse than past when he toiled endlessly to net some \$200 as his yearly profits.

## MARIAN WRIGHT CONTINUED

—enough to cover 125 centers for six months. Although Marian was in London at the time conferring with civil rights groups and sharing experiences which might aid them in a solution to Britain's racial problems, she supported CDGM's action.

"Folk down here know Sargent Shriver is a political animal and that Stennis is the Number Two man on the Appropriations Committee. They may not have an education but they've got darn good sense. They know when the funds are being held up and why," Marian says. "And they're hungry enough and desperate enough and not afraid anymore to do something about it." When possible, Marian likes to get local people to communicate personally with federal officials (this has included Shriver) "in order to make officials aware that they have to deal directly with the poor people and that the Mississippi Negro can speak for himself."

In her ability to coordinate a law practice, field work and community projects successfully, Marian closely resembles her mother, whom she describes as "an organizer." She sums up her mother in one sentence: "She is a very strong and independent woman." The similarities between mother and daughter end there.

"I guess my mother belongs to another generation," says Marian. "She feels civil rights progress is coming, but she doesn't want to push too rapidly. She wants equality, but she is not the type to get out and march for it. Mother is very middle class. She wanted me to go to college, marry a doctor from Howard, live near her and raise the children while my husband became successful." Though far apart on civil rights, Marian and her mother still maintain a close relationship. Marian helps with her mother's support and manages to get home often, in spite of her tight schedule.

Mrs. Wright (who runs an old folks home she and her husband

started in Bennettsville years ago and also takes care of four foster children) was surprised when Marian shifted her interest from music to law. "Marian has a beautiful voice and my oldest daughter had changed her major to let Marian be in music. But I want her to be happy. I just decided I would turn her loose. I learned early you can't choose your children's vocation. I always tell them I'm ready to help them with whatever they want to do, even if they want to go to the moon."

If anything, Marian is a hybrid between her mother and father. She "sort of cropped up" six years after her other brothers and sister had been born and was only 15 when her father died. He lived long enough, however, to leave his mark on Marian. She credits him for her "initial involvement and commitment to race relations" and with "being exposed to Negro leadership." He also saw that she understood the importance of helping people less fortunate than she. "Nothing is too lowly for you to do," he used to tell her. Finally, he impressed upon her "the need to be prepared, to learn as much as possible."

She remembers "daddy was a 'no nonsense' kind of guy. He was a religious person but not overly demonstrative. He would never allow any screaming in his church. He would never talk down to the congregation.

"In civil rights, he was more from the Booker T. Washington school. He did what he could. He felt race discrimination was not his problem but the white man's. He would say, 'If we can't go to their playground or school we will build our own.' He made me realize that the South's sickness in no way diminished my intrinsic worth as a human being. He constantly told me I was as good as anybody and to never let anyone make me believe differently."

While Reverend Wright always admired Fisk University and had hoped Marian would go there as her sister did, she ended up at Spelman, a compromise aimed at pleasing all members of the family. "I was just turning 16 then and they didn't want me to go too far away where I wouldn't know anyone."

Marian and her older brother Harry appear to be the only ones to have inherited their father's bent for active participation in civil rights. Her sister, married with two children, teaches in Washington. Another brother, also married and father of three, teaches in Brooklyn, N. Y., while her youngest brother teaches high school history in Laurinburg, N. C. Brother Harry, who became a father substitute, pastors the church her parents started in Bennettsville.

The young attorney describes her family as "all good middle class people. They find me extremely radical but they have never tried to hamper me." While they consider her somewhat of a maverick, she maintains, "I knew I would always come back to the South. It never occurred to me to move North as a solution. I've always been resentful and frustrated with life in the South. In Europe I learned what being an individual meant. I knew I couldn't come back and be one in the South unless things changed."

Marian's mother remembers the day she asked her if she weren't afraid to go to Mississippi. Marian answered, "At times I am, but someone has to go and I guess I'll have to be one of the ones to do it." Says Herschell Sullivan, who has known Marian since they were both students at Spelman, "She has a deep commitment to people and an insatiable desire to feel needed and know she is doing something worthwhile. Marian doesn't go to church much but she is deeply religious. She seems to believe in God so firmly and in doing good work. I think her attitude about Mississippi is part of her religious conviction. I've always admired her absolute determination to do the things she believes in."

Marian's commitment to the civil rights movement is strong, weakened, perhaps, only by her impatience with mediocrity and her tendency to reject non-demonstrative civil rights action.

Says 54-year-old Carsie Hall, a native Mississippian who passed the state bar in 1953 after studying for some three years on his own, "I feel at times that her approach is radical but I guess her methods of getting things done are in keeping with the pace of the time. She gets annoyed if something isn't done right the first time or as good as she expects. If you didn't know Marian you wouldn't befriend her. When you get to know her, though, you find out she doesn't care what people think. She takes personalities into no account." Roommate Herschell, who worked on her master's at Columbia University while Marian interned at the Inc. Fund's New York office, suggests: "Unconsciously she tends to repudiate types of things other people in the movement are doing. I think





**Hectic working day begins quietly** for Marian and Henry, who first came to Mississippi on lark as volunteer lawyer in summer, 1964. Product of upper middle-class Seattle home, he was overwhelmed, couldn't believe such conditions existed in U.S.

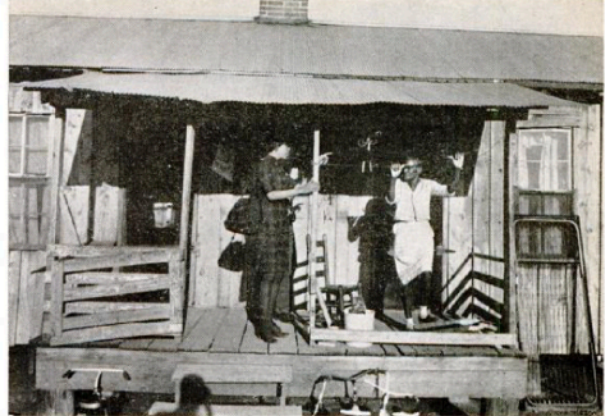
intellectually she understands their commitment might not be as obvious as hers. Emotionally, she feels every Negro should be on the front line."

Many would argue that progress in Mississippi is an illusion and that if the present governor is re-elected civil rights could be set back 10 years. More optimistic, Marian says things in the state are improving. She describes the lack of moderate white leadership as "a tragedy," but talks enthusiastically about a group of white students in Jackson who are tutoring young Negroes and about the white classmates who wrote a letter of welcome to the lone little Negro girl in their class.

She finds distressing and disgusting, however, the internal bickering among civil rights groups. "There's so much to be done down here, there's enough room for fifty organizations. Marian credits SNCC with "opening up Mississippi" and being the only organization to really go to the people and encourage local leadership among them. "They did a lot of stupid things, and they did a lot of good," she says. Conversely, she adds, the NAACP "seems unable to come up with any programs at the grass root level." The lawyer has always wished more Negroes would do more than talk about civil rights. "If the movement had to depend upon Negroes alone for financial support, it would have ended long ago," she says.

What seems to worry her most is that the entire movement "suffers from the lack of long-range planning. SNCC told the folks to come off the plantation and go vote. But what do they do after? I'm not criticizing any one organization. I am ashamed of us all. We've been incapable of following any one program to conclusion, mainly because we're absolutely exhausted and over extended now. But you've got to deal with the fundamental problems like jobs, poverty, education. Otherwise the people come to mass meetings, say 'Amen' but go home and do the same things they've been doing."

Marian gives almost all her time to civil rights. Her personal life is al-



**Filmsy shack is home** for typical plantation family. While Negroes in Mississippi are poor, there are more poor whites. Marian estimates that "20 per cent of whites are above poverty level, 40 per cent are poor and the other 40 per cent real poor."



**Marian visits adult sewing class** with Art Thomas, director of Delta Ministry of National Council of Churches which operates Mount Beulah center. When quilt is completed, it will be sold at a cooperative shop Negroes have set up in Jackson.



**Time to meet personal needs** is scarce for busy young woman who allows herself 15 minutes to shop, a few more minutes to whip up lobster dinner which she shares, below, with (l. to r.), CDGM Director John Mudd, Henry Aronson and Art Thomas.







British sought out legal whiz recently when she addressed student group (left), at Oxford University. With Robert Moses (center, L) brilliant figure in U. S. civil rights movement, she was shown around campus, appeared before Committee Against Racial Discrimination. Dr. David Pitt (behind Marian), is West Indian head of group.

**MARIAN WRIGHT** CONTINUED

most non-existent. When she's just about had it, she goes to New York for a day or two or seeks seclusion in the six-room, modernly furnished home she is buying in Jackson. If she could, she would spend hours listening to classical and folk music and reading literature as well as books on law, political science and economics. Rushing to prepare a full meal and set the table she says wistfully, "Lord, I wish I had time to be lonely or take care of the house and do the sort of things normal people do."

Friends and foes find it hard to either categorize or characterize Marian, both as a lawyer and as a person. A warm individual who can laugh and play with a two-year-old as quickly as cry at the sight of a one-room school house for 300 children, she is at her best when visiting with the local folk in Mississippi. Says colleague Aronson, "She has overwhelming depth, sensitivity and an uncanny ability to communicate with people."

For a long time she has had a particular interest in helping students, not just those in the South. She won't hesitate to write a five-page letter to a student who has sought her advice, but she refuses to spend time at club meetings and teas or over the telephone. She puts up with publicity ("if it'll help the movement") but still reacts to being described as "fragile," even though she is a mere 103 pounds.

The most disarming thing about Marian is her complete lack of inhibition. Former classmates at Spelman still laugh at the memory of her running around campus, her pajamas hidden only by a skirt. Until

she mastered the art of pushing them up and pinning them at the bottom, it was a constant struggle to get to class on time. At Yale, the Negro men students remember she used to tease them about not being gentlemen. In defense, one of the fellows mapped a strategy: he would rush ahead of her and hold the door open—for fifteen minutes without letting her pass. Less critical now but still "something else," she thinks nothing of putting visitors to the Jackson office to work, doing anything from typing to going out and getting lunch for the staff.

Since she has been in Mississippi, Marian has learned that being a lawyer and a woman has both its advantages and drawbacks. In court, her presence forces white male lawyers to be polite. "It looks worse if they are rude to me than to Henry." At the same time, she rebels against women taking advantage of their femininity. "In court I'm just another lawyer, not a female lawyer." And she demands respect. "The judges and lawyers have a habit of calling Negro lawyers by their first name in court. I can't take that." In the future she will undoubtedly have to make a decision: to continue with the movement, get married, or try to manage both. Not even she knows what she will do, except that "I don't want my children saying all the time, 'Momma's at a meeting or in court.'"

Still, during a recent interview when she was asked how long she plans to be in Mississippi, she answered, "I'll be here indefinitely." That seems a long time to stay in one place—especially Mississippi—even for a person like Marian Wright. But then as she likes to tell friends and reporters, "Come to Mississippi and you won't ask why I'm here or why I want to stay. You can see for yourself."



Prepared to cope with any situation that might arise in almost any setting, from the formal quarters of Britain's Institute for Race Relations (left), to the sun-baked cotton fields of Mississippi, Marian Wright is an impatient young woman who is determined to show others how to change that which, for so long, has been taken for granted.