

I made “One More River To Cross” in 1968-69 as a documentary of the work of the Southwest Georgia Project, part of the Civil Rights Movement. The Southwest Georgia Project was started by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), one of the major organizations of The Movement. In 1961 SNCC sent Charles Sherrod, its first Field Secretary, to Albany, Georgia to start the Project. Half a century later he remains the Project’s leader.

From its founding SNCC had been a black-and-white organization. In fact its symbol were two hands clasped together, one black, one white. However, in 1966 Stokely Carmichael became SNCC’s leader and soon made it an all black organization. Sherrod remained convinced of the importance of whites in The Movement, so the Southwest Georgia Project officially broke with SNCC and operated independently thereafter.



An ordained Baptist minister, Sherrod had taken a year off from the pressures of The Movement to do a Master’s degree at Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1967, so it became a natural place for him to recruit volunteers. At that time I was a student there, and in the summer of 1967 my wife Susan and I went to southwest Georgia. We were soon assigned to Baker County, south of Albany, where we joined a few other organizers living in a shack that had been abandoned by a neighboring black farmer.

I was an experienced still photographer, and soon built a primitive dark room at the back of the shack. The local kids called it the “black out room.” Soon I was photographing the people we worked with, almost all poor and rural.

Sometime during the year my father loaned me a 16mm film camera he had used to shoot home movies. It was small and limited. It took cassettes that held fifty feet of film, only a minute and twenty seconds running time. He would send me the cassettes, some with black-and-white, some with color film. That was fine by me: as a still photographer I shot both ways, as the scene suggested. In my naivete saw no issue mixing the two in a film, as you will see in the final product.

While I was an experienced still photographer, I had no training or experience as a filmmaker, and the film is flawed as a result. It is too long, the structure simple, scene-to-scene editing sometimes clumsy, and coverage scenes (“B-Roll”) often seem unrelated to the commentary. People are not identified with subtitles, and the film lacks a narrator to help the viewer understand their commentary by providing some context. As a result, the content is often less than clear.

I have attempted to remedy some of those shortcomings in this edition. I have added some narration to provide context, subtitles to identify people, and a short text at the end to update the story forty two years after the film was made. I have endeavored to keep these additions as short as necessary to be helpful, and as unobtrusive as possible.

The film also has its strengths. Some of the images remain among the most powerful I've ever photographed. It's filled with black church and Gospel music and Movement Freedom Songs, recorded on location - who can fail to be moved by that? And I hope the film has value as an historical document. Five people deeply involved in the struggle, four of whom have since passed away, speak freely to the viewer. They are among many who redeemed America in the sixties, at great personal risk and sacrifice. We are all forever in their debt.

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