

FEDERAL JURY FREES FIVE
IN MISSISSIPPI BEATING

OXFORD, MISSISSIPPI: Five Mississippi law officers, charged by the U. S. Department of Justice with seven counts of conspiracy to deprive five Negroes of their civil rights, were set free here by a Federal jury.

The five were accused of beating five civil rights workers arrested in Winona, Mississippi after they entered a white rest room at a bus station there.

State highway patrolman John L. Basinger, Montgomery County Sheriff Earle Wayne Patridge, and Winona Police Chief Thomas J. Herod, Jr., all claimed they were innocent of the seven charges brought against them by the Justice Department.

The Justice Department called six witnesses, including four of the Negro complainants, and two FBI agents.

June Johnson, Euvester Simpson, Rosemary Freeman, and Lawrence Guyot, all testified that they had been beaten in the Winona jail.

Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer told the court that she was kicked by Sheriff Patridge after he yanked her off a bus in front of the bus station in Winona. She testified that she had remained on the bus while her four companions entered a segregated lunch room. All five were arrested on charges of disorderly conduct.

Annelle Ponder, a field secretary for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, testified that three of the defendants beat her in the Winona city jail on June 9. She said, "And I'm not completely over it yet."

James Harold West, a SNCC worker, told the court he was beaten by policemen and two Negro prisoners who were ordered to beat and kick him. He said he was later forced by a policeman to sign a statement saying that no beating took place.

Two Negroes who were in the jail testified that they had been 'paid' a pint and a half of corn whiskey for beating West.

Guyot, a SNCC field secretary, told the all-white jury he was "kicked, punched, and beaten with a slapjack" when he went to Winona to post bond for West and the women. Guyot said Sheriff Earl Patridge ordered him to "get out of Winona and stay gone" but he was stopped by highwayman Basinger and knocked down because he refused to say "sir" to the officer.

Then, said Guyot, he was forced to disrobe and was beaten in the sheriff's office before he was jailed for "disturbing the peace."

FBI agents took the stand to introduce photographs showing injuries to the five. One agent testified he had examined a bloodstained shirt worn by Miss Johnson while she was under arrest.