



**Smithsonian Institution**

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

## **Pamphlet: At the Funeral of Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi: A Tribute in Tears and a Thrust for Freedom**

Extracted on Mar-28-2024 09:17:02

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cessional, subdued voices began to raise a song in protest which rolled gently along the whole length of the marching column.

It was the modern version of the old spiritual from the days of slavery -- "We Shall Overcome, Some Day." The steel-helmeted, jack-booted police, with their heavy pistols slung low on their hips, pounded their clubs in their hands and shifted nervously from foot to foot but made no move to interfere. After all, the march had reached its end, the 2:00 witching hour was only minutes away and the "off the streets" curfew would soon be back in force.

#### END OF MARCH

The funeral march was over. Thousands of mourners milled about the Collins Funeral Home on North Farish street which held the remains of Medgar Evers. Somehow there was comfort in the con-fraternity of the crowd of one's friends, colleagues, kinsmen.

No one was in a mood to rush away to the chores of a Saturday evening household. Especially when one carries within oneself the iron weight of knowledge that "the law" commands that you, a Negro, must get off of the streets and into your own house.

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Then it was that I heard it. The soft soprano voice rising above the sounds of the throng, caroling the words to the tune that has become a kind of anthem of the freedom marchers. "Oh Freedom; Oh, Oh Freedom! Before I be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave. . . ."

The song was coming from the half-opened mouth of a little slip of a girl maybe five feet tall but not quite a hundred pounds, whose skin had the soft-brown color of honey; whose eyes now flashed wide and brown pupiled, then closed tight in the prayerful ecstasy of the resolution of the words of her song. She kept the beat of her song by patting the fingers of one hand into the palm of the other.

The people opened a circle of space for her. And into the circle came first one then another young woman of her own late 'teen or early 20's age group.

#### THE SONG RISES

As the volume of song rose, the circle enlarged and in the circle had now come several young men to join the chorus. Those in the outer ring of the circle were now joining in the singing and vigorously clapping out the beat. Soon the singing crowd had fully covered the street from sidewalk to sidewalk.

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