

Home Plate

She Can't Go Home Again

By JACKIE ROBINSON

"Home," someone once said, "is a place you can go to when there's nowhere else to go."

Let me tell you the story of a Mississippi girl. She is twenty-three years old. Her name is Annie and she can't go home again.

Annie is one of the displaced persons in the battle for human dignity, a fugitive who became a fugitive in the cause of freedom.

She didn't murder anyone. She didn't steal. She did nothing more immoral than to stand up in her Mississippi community and raise her voice in protest against the conditions under which she and her family and her people are forced to live. She is guilty of the crime of volunteering to work for civil rights.

In Mississippi, that is a crime. And Annie, who made the mistake of believing that the Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights, Constitution and Civil Rights Bill apply to Mississippi, was soon made to recognize that fact.

But before she realized that the Star-Spangled Banner and Oath of Allegiance are meaningless in Mississippi, Annie protested. She protested against the fact that Government-sponsored factories offer whites jobs at sixty to seventy dollars a week — and



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segregate those Negroes whom they hire. Many, many Negroes cannot get jobs in these factories. So they work for eight to ten dollars a week, interminable hours a day, caring for white peoples' homes and children. Annie thought it was wrong that discrimination and segregation could be practised in a factory which, in part, owes its existence to the tax dollars of black as well as white citizens. She said so — out loud.

Annie saw young, married couples, forced to live in single houses built to accommodate one family — as many as sixteen couples occupying such facilities because they could afford no better. She saw some of these same people fired from their stingy little jobs because they had expressed the desire to vote and attempted to register to do so. She protested that too.

Early this year, Annie's uncle and three other Negroes were murdered in circumstances somewhat similar to the murders of the infamous Goodman-Chaney-Schwerner case. When their bullet-ridden bodies were found, there was no national publicity of the kind which attended that case. Annie knows why. They were only Negroes. In Mississippi, the life of a Negro is dirt cheap. Annie knows that if Goodman and Schwerner had been Negroes as Chaney was, the country might never have known their deaths occurred.

Annie could tell that her turn was coming soon. She was threatened and harassed. A sister who resembles her was the constant object of surveillance and veiled threats. Right now, Annie knows that the rest of her family, back home, is still subjected to the nerve-racking business of hate-filled looks and words, the knowledge that any one of them could be mysteriously struck down — or could mysteriously disappear. What's worse — from past experience — they all know that the Government, state or federal,

would do nothing about it. For all they know, law enforcement officers — white — could be involved in helping the murderers or assailants. It has happened before. And when it happened, people like former Attorney General Robert Kennedy have told the country the national government has no jurisdiction.

Annie can't understand that. She can't understand how they can free Klansmen who shoot down a Negro colonel. She can't understand how, despite the President's recent statement that arrests were imminent in the Meridian murders, nothing has happened. Annie understands one thing. She can't go home again. Actually, since Mississippi is her home, Annie has no home.

There are too many Annies in this land where the free and brave cannot be safe. Perhaps, some day, the American people will rise up and demand that their Government do something about it besides pass civil rights bills and mouth pretty words. Maybe!

Robinson, Jackie. "She Can't Go Home Again." *New York Amsterdam News*, September 26, 1964.