

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MAE MALLORY CASE

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AFTER SERVING more than a year in jail, Mrs. Mae Mallory walked out of prison on a \$15,000 bond posted by the Monroe Defense Committee. On Thursday morning, March 14, 1963, a mandate from the Ohio Supreme Court reached the Cuyahoga County Sheriff's office ordering immediate release of Mrs. Mallory. Though free from prison, she is fighting against extradition to North Carolina to face Southern "justice" on a frame-up charge of kidnapping during a racist attack on the Afro-American community in Monroe, North Carolina.

The point I want to stress, however, is that wherever Mae Mallory is, one can be very sure her voice is being raised against discrimination and injustice, be it in prison or in Hell itself. There issues from this bulky woman a pervasive spiritual quality that energizes, that is celebrated throughout many sectors of this and other lands and this woman has earned an everlasting niche in the annals of a people's struggle for freedom.

Mrs. Mallory was one of the group of nine Harlem mothers who stood with Attorney Paul Zuber against New York City's segregated school set-up, and paid for such impertinence with thirty days in prison. Of the nine mothers she alone spent time in jail. The reason is not difficult to fathom, for it is unquestionably certain that Mae Mallory's defiance of the segregated schooling her children had to

suffer and endure was far more impertinent and exasperating than any other.

Some said: "That woman should have been home taking care of those kids instead of getting herself locked up." But how can aware parents watch their children slowly strangle to death in Harlem's ghetto, even before they have begun to know that they are alive, and fail to act?

How can a parent, if he is really watching, gaze at that form and spirit to whom he has given life and love, and fail to see the painfully clear evidence that the joy, wonder and discovery of the child's early school years has been preempted by the scurrilous mark of oppression on the psyche of innocent black children who skip and frolic to the branding iron each morning.

Mae Mallory looked at her children. She put their trot into reverse gear so that they, and others like them, might enjoy something more from this land than she, and others like her have been able to gain. And if it was correct to say that she should have been at home taking care of her children, then it is manifestly correct to say that a lot more parents should have kept their children out of New York City's segregated schools until they were transformed into American schools.

The list of Mae Mallory's political "iniquities" in the Harlem community is too long for this piece. It is important, however, to note that like many other black women who have played a heroic role in the fight for justice, her eye was not focused solely on parochial issues and considerations. She scanned the whole landscape, and whenever her countrymen and countrywomen were in trouble because their skin was black—which is to say the entire United States—Mae Mallory evidenced a deep concern.

In August 1961, when Robert Williams was ready to activate plans to picket Monroe, North Carolina's government-sponsored swimming pool, and the whole embattled community knew trouble would soon follow, Mae Mallory was true to her heritage—exemplified in the spirit of Harriet Tubman, who soon after successful escape from Southern tyranny declared, "I had crossed the line of which I had so long been dreaming. I was free but there was no one to welcome me in the land of freedom. I was a stranger in a strange land." Harriet Tubman then pledged to help free her people still in bondage in the South. In the tradition of her great forebear, Mae Mallory answered Mr. Williams' call for aid and traveled to Monroe's racist cauldron.

Had the country been favored with a truly free press and had the truth about the Monroe situation become known, the events that

followed Mae Mallory's arrival in Monroe should have aroused the conscience of America. But there is little purpose in belaboring the point, the evidence over some 400 years is too clear—America has precious little heart and soul, and even less mindfulness. And so Robert Williams had to escape to Cuba with his family, eluding a nationwide federal dragnet. Several youth who had the courage to stand with Williams in defense of their right to live as men face long prison terms if convicted. And Mae Mallory was jailed in Ohio where she had expected to receive sanctuary from the "hounds" of Monroe.

And over what did this situation occur? Over a charge by a white couple in Monroe that they had been kidnapped by Robert Williams. A blasphemous charge in view of the fact that Williams had admitted the couple into his home to *protect* them from harm.

Criminals get bail. Billy Sol Estes, who bilked the Government for millions of dollars, gets bail, but black folk who fight for dignity are denied this fundamental American right. For over a year a fight was waged to get Mrs. Mallory out on bail. The case has gone through every court in the state of Ohio. It was presented to Supreme Court Justices Potter Stewart and Hugo Black, both of whom denied this basic constitutional request. And note this—she was in jail all this time even though no judicial proceedings had been held in which a criminal charge had been processed!

But those in Cleveland who have stood fast behind her did not give up and fought until her release was won. The question of extradition to Monroe, North Carolina, is now before the U.S. Supreme Court. In jail or out, Mae Mallory is a genuine American heroine, and the bars have not yet been forged that can prevent her spirit from marching ever onward.