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A cool eye among the camellias

Marshall Frady, the free-lance author of the article on South Carolina Congressman Mendel Rivers, is given to long interludes between encounters with his barber. When he and Photographer Co Rentmeester, whose hair was even longer, were in Allendale, S.C. preparing the Rivers story, Frady says, "I guess we just looked eminently alien and generally subversive to the motel manager." The manager grew more and more surly until finally he laid out the problem: "Why don't y'all go get a haircut!" Hearing about the incident, another rather long-haired man in their party walked by the desk shaking his head sadly. "Well," he said huskily, "I just don't guess we'll be able to come back and stay at this place anymore." It was Mendel Rivers.

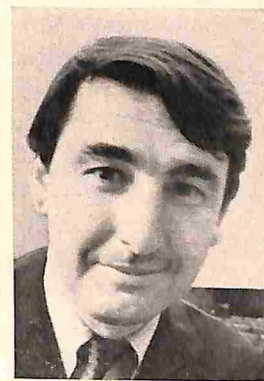
"Mendel always seemed a little befuddled at why LIFE was all that interested in him," Frady said last week. "He just didn't understand why we wanted to take pictures of him in his front yard. He's not an easily manageable man for anybody. He'd oblige us for a matter of seconds—then barge off on his own impulses again. But he made a truly heroic effort on our behalf, he really did."

Frady was explaining this on the phone from his home near Atlanta, and suddenly there was a lot of noise in the background. "Oh, that's just the general rabble outside the door," he said, chuckling. "We're used to living with it. People throwing torches on the roof and swinging nooses."

Even for a Baptist preacher's son born and raised in Georgia and South Carolina, the living may not always be easy in the South when you write from a social and political point of view that tends to boggle local sensibilities. A South Carolina newspaper recently called him "a carpetbagger in disguise."

The nine months he lived in Montgomery, Ala. researching his book on George Wallace was, Frady says, "the most devastating experience of my life. You'd be in a restaurant talking about Wallace's classic abilities as a chewer of toothpicks—and folks all around would swivel in their chairs muttering. However grim some places might be, though, I still feel more at home in the South than anyplace else. I wouldn't want to live in, say, New York and become part of the detached, critical 'assessors from afar.' You lose voltage, connections that way. I think it means something to be writing out of what you're living in."

Actually, of course, that last quote sounded more like "writin' what you're livin' in"—Frady's accent, which suggests the camellias that always seem to grow in his stories, doubtless opens many verandas to him. But it can also leave him open to bad connections in the North. There was, for example, the New York cab driver who, hearing Frady speak recently, immediately assumed that he had a receptive audience and began talking about "niggers." Frady quickly interrupted. "If they's one thing I can't stand," he said, "it's a amateur bigot."



MARSHALL FRADY

Ralph Graves
RALPH GRAVES
Managing Editor

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