

# faith in the law



**ONEAL MOORE**  
1931-1965  
Black deputy killed by  
Nightriders,  
Varnado, La.

His older brother teased him, and his mother worried endlessly, but Oneal Moore could not have been prouder when he was chosen to be one of the first black deputies in Washington Parish, La. His selection was no surprise to those who knew him. Moore was a 34-year-old Army veteran who had distinguished himself as a leader in his church, his local fraternal lodge and the PTA. He had four daughters who idolized him and a wife who had great ambitions for him and their children. Oneal's eight brothers and sisters remembered him as a confident, hard-working youth who treated all people with respect but who would not let anyone take advantage of him.

Moore became deputy in

Washington Parish at a dangerous time. The parish was known to have the largest Klan membership per capita of any place in the country, and it was not unusual for carloads of white thugs to ride through black areas shooting at homes and cars. Sheriff Dorman A. Crowe named Moore and another man, Creed Rogers, deputies in response to black demands for more police protection. The appointments enraged some whites, particularly members of the Ku Klux Klan.

Despite the white animosity, Moore was proud of his appointment. He let his daughters listen to the police radio in his patrol car. When his brother Ameal teased him about being a deputy, Oneal put on his uniform and bash-

fully told his brother, "This ain't no tin badge." Oneal's younger sisters, who had always looked up to him, nearly burst with pride. Only his mother was frightened.

Oneal knew he had put himself and his family at risk by accepting the job, and he tried to be cautious. While other blacks in the area marched and picketed, and some even armed themselves as defense against the Klan, Moore avoided civil rights activities. He wanted only to be able to perform his duty — to protect law-abiding citizens from violence and crime.

## AMBUSHED

Exactly a year after they were appointed, Rogers and Moore had finished their nightly pa-





trol and were heading home toward Varnado when their car was hit by a volley of gunfire. Moore was hit in the head and instantly killed. Rogers was wounded in the shoulder and blinded in one eye. As their attackers sped away, Rogers managed to broadcast a description of their car on the police radio.

News of the killing spread quickly, and officials feared there would be more violence. They were right: Three days after Moore's death, bullets were

fired into the home of a white deputy who was heading the murder investigation. Sheriff Crowe said the shooting was probably the work of white extremists, and he pledged all resources to solve the murder and the shooting. Louisiana Gov. John McKeithen offered a \$25,000 reward for information leading to the killers of Oneal Moore.


In response to the killing, civil rights activists in Washington Parish stepped up their marches and demon-

strations. A black self-defense group called the Deacons for Defense placed armed guards in black neighborhoods. Hundreds of state police were brought in to help prevent violence. Gov. McKeithen came to Bogalusa to meet with black activists and white segregationists, urging both sides to remain calm.

Despite the rage that many blacks felt at the murder of Oneal Moore, Maevella Moore would allow no signs of anger at her husband's funeral. She asked national civil rights leaders attending the funeral to make no public statements. A *New York Times* reporter described the eulogy as "remarkably free of bitterness."

Black boycotts finally succeeded in forcing the integration of restaurants and theaters in Bogalusa. Rural black youth began learning about their rights at Freedom Schools run by the Congress of Racial Equality. And a massive voter registration drive added hundreds of blacks to the voting rolls.

The murder case was never solved. Police arrested a suspect — a man named Ernest Ray McElveen who belonged to several white supremacist groups, including the National States Rights Party, the United Conservatives and the White Citizens Council. However, the charges against him were unexplainably dismissed, and neither McElveen nor anyone else was ever prosecuted for the murder of Oneal Moore.

The case was reopened in 1990 by the FBI and dropped. In 2001, it was again reopened but has since stalled. 

OPPOSITE PAGE

Maevella Moore sits between her daughters, Tresslar (left) and Regina (right), at the burial of her husband. Maevella's mother and Oneal Moore's father are seated at left.

LEFT

A Klansman passes out calling cards in Bogalusa. Washington Parish was known as a center of Klan activity in the mid-1960s.