Reflections of Edwin P. Stephenson

Next I got assigned to Orlando, Florida, where the Quakers had established a camp of 25 men under the Health Department for hookworm control, which meant building outdoor privies in rural areas and destroying the old ones. In those days the headquarters for the state Ku Klux Klan was in Orlando. I went to Orlando where the Quakers hoped that a group of us would study Gunnar Myrdal’s book which had just come out, *The American Dilemma.* But before I got there I helped a couple of the men with some drama who had been working in a black school. Some of the white people took offense and they had to spirit the two Cos out of the city. We never did study Myrdal.

I was interested in knowing more about blacks, so I went to NAACP meetings and other places where I would meet blacks. I was invited to go a political meeting one Sunday night at a black Baptist church. All the white politicians had been invited, but none came. Many sent telegrams that were read at the meeting. Two of us from the CPS camp were there and as we came out, we got arrested. We went to the police station and they were having us put things out of our pockets on a shelf, and I said I wanted to use the telephone. And they said, “put your stuff on the shelf.” And I said, “I want to use the telephone.” And they said, “Do you want to use the sweat room?” Well, I knew they had a sweat room and I knew they would use it. In Orlando, Florida, I was not about to get into a sweat room. So I went to jail.

Excerpted with permission from Men of Peace: World War II Conscientious Objectors, Editor, Mary Hopkins, Publisher, Producciones de la Hamaca, 2010, pp. 62, 63.