

# TIME

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ROBERT LIGHTFOOT III

GUEST ALINSKY



DAVID GAHR

MODERATOR SHIELDS

*Just call collect for an argument.*

## The Cool Hot Line

The hot-line show is one of the most discredited forms of radio programming. What could be more unedifying than know-nothing listeners phoning in their philosophies to know-it-all ex-disk jockeys? But this summer the United Methodist Church is making judicious use of the format. It is sponsoring a radio dialogue between the races that is more compelling than any heard on the sudden multitude of such talk shows, including those produced on TV.

The name of the program is *Night Call*, and it is carried live (11:30 p.m.-12:30 a.m., E.D.T.) five evenings a week on an *ad hoc* chain that has grown from 21 to 57 radio stations in less than three months. Listeners anywhere may phone collect (Area Code 212: 749-3311) and argue racial issues with an influential national figure who is guest of the night, say James Baldwin, the Rev.

Ralph Abernathy, Muhammad Ali, Sargent Shriver or Arthur Miller.

The most provocative visitor so far—judging by the number of callers totted up by the phone company—was Stokely Carmichael, who was dialed by 64,440 Americans. In customary form, Carmichael told one listener who wondered about the impact of nonviolence on whites, "You should ask Martin Luther King that question." A white guest who stirred a big switchboard jam was New York's Mayor John Lindsay. Quizzed on the war in Viet Nam, Lindsay replied that it was "unproductive, unwanted, endless, bottomless, sideless, and its cost is unquestionably affecting the problems in our cities." Another night, White Radical Saul Alinsky, in sympathy with black callers, blasted the Job Corps as a "payoff to stay quiet" and categorized much of the rest of the poverty program as "a public relations gimmick."

**Ranting Nuts.** Thanks to a specially built phone link-up system, the program's guest generally participates as the listeners do—by long-distance from his home. A Manhattan staffer receives calls on three phones, screening out "the drunks and ranting nuts." The twelve or 15 most pertinent questions are put through to the show's moderator, Del Shields. In case the conversation gets libelous or licentious, Shields can push a cut-off button, but he has not yet had to use it. Though the discussion is frequently fiery, about the roughest language used to date was Rap Brown's dismissal of civil rights legislation as "intellectual masturbation."

Shields, who is a radio veteran and militant black, got into the debate himself once when he felt that a Negro caller was unfairly attacking Guest Jackie Robinson for Uncle Tomism. Often, Moderator Shields, who hits fungoes to the guest for ten or 15 minutes before turning him over to the phone-in audience, is the toughest interrogator of the night. Roy Innis, director of CORE, should know what is in store for him next month. Shields plans to ask him "Has CORE gone Tom?"