

## Chapter 18 Registering the Voters

**R**obert Moses traveled throughout Mississippi over the summer of 1960 promoting a fall conference of a youth-oriented organization founded in April, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) pronounced “SNICK.”

The twenty-five year old New York math teacher looked up dozens of people, seeking their advice and support, but it was civil rights veteran Amzie Moore of Cleveland who truly welcomed the idea of the student movement coming to Mississippi. Moore, like Moses, had followed the sit-in movement and unlike some other NAACP organizers away from big cities, Moore welcomed the idea of outside civil rights workers coming into his territory.<sup>1</sup>

Moore welcomed all student help except for sit-ins, he explained to Moses, because the police would instantly squelch them, and too little media publicity would come from the effort; the Delta was too isolated to draw much national or even statewide media attention.

Moore wanted the emphasis on voter registration, he told his new SNCC friend, introducing him to the Southern Regional Council or SRC. The organization had recently completed a study showing only 5 percent of Mississippi’s half-million blacks were registered to vote. Only 25 percent of the registered blacks voted, compared to 60 percent of registered white voters.

In the Delta, Mississippi’s Third Congressional District, 67 percent of adults were black and only 3 percent of black adults were registered. Mississippi, in other words – the state with the highest number of blacks in the country – had the lowest percentage of registered black voters. Mississippi’s blacks were almost totally disenfranchised and were kept in this non-voting status by “all forms of violence, intimidation, and discrimination.”

It was Ella Baker, a good friend of Amzie Moore and a leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, who sent Bob Moses to Mississippi. And it was from Baker that Moses received valued guidance and support as he helped build the new organization in the state. Margaret Block, one of SNCC’s first Delta volunteers, joined SNCC mainly because of Baker. “She really believed we must all help the next generation succeed, and this is why I like to tell children now when I talk to them about the civil rights movement – their part or their role is to help others be a part of change, too.”

### Ella Baker – a place in history

Ella Baker is credited for introducing “participatory democracy” to the modern civil rights movement. Biographer Barbara Ransby describes Baker as a person who really believed that for poor and oppressed people to become a part of society that is meaningful, the system had to be radically changed: “This means facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising means by which you change that system,” Baker wrote wrote in 1969.

Ransby, in describing the heart of Baker's social philosophy, told how the early civil rights leader spent her entire adult life "trying to change the system."

"Somewhere along the way she recognized that her goal was not a single 'end' but rather an ongoing 'means,' that is, a process. Radical change for Ella Baker was about a persistent and protracted process of discourse, debate, consensus, reflection, and struggle. If larger and larger numbers of communities were engaged in such a process, she reasoned, day in and day out, year after year, the revolution would be well under way."

Ella Baker understood that laws, structures, and institutions had to change in order to correct injustice and oppression, but part of the process had to involve oppressed people, ordinary people, infusing new meanings into the concept of democracy and finding their own individual and collective power to determine their lives and shape the direction of history, Ransby observed.

"These were the radical terms that Ella Baker thought in and the radical ideas she fought for with her mind and her body. Just as the 'end' for her was not a scripted utopia but another phase of struggle, the means of getting there was not scripted either. Baker's theory of social change and political organizing was inscribed in her practice. Her ideas were written in her work: a coherent body of lived text spanning nearly sixty years."<sup>ii</sup>

SNCC volunteers would spearhead a major, sustained voter registration campaign in the Mississippi Delta while meeting expected, fierce opposition. The conflict would let the nation know the story of Mississippi's racial intolerance and most Americans, Moore and other planners believed, would not accept this denial of a fundamental right of all citizens.

Moore had spent the years after World War II building his business and a comfortable brick house to live in, all the while buying as much local real estate as he could afford. His transformation came when one day he traveled over to Mound Bayou to view some property up for sale. He would never forget what he encountered:

Set back on the property was a shack and Moore asked to look inside. When he opened the door, Moore faced fourteen malnourished black children huddled around a metal barrel, trying to keep warm by burning cotton stalks. The rest of the room was empty – there was no furniture at all. Some of the children were wrapped in quilts.

The mother was naked from the waist down and quietly told Moore she had no food to give her children. Moore "mumbled some awkward words of regret and groped his way out into the sunlight." He left with the image of this poor family stuck in his mind. But it was then that Amzie Moore began figuring it was sinful to think in terms of trying to get rich, particularly after what he had seen that day. The black leader would remember the experience as his personal turning point.<sup>iii</sup>

Moses and a team of SNCC workers were encouraged by Moore's support and returned to the Delta the following summer ready to take on the difficult task of organizing in the poorest, most racist and most violent

state in the country. Martin Luther King, Jr., the leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), had encouraged the creation of SNCC, assuming that SNCC would organize itself as an arm of SCLC. But the students were independent from the very start.

The key to voter registration success was in the Delta, where blacks outnumbered whites, SNCC leaders believed. Moses created a proposal for the project, using several ideas for voter registration schools that Moore suggested.

A Catholic priest, Father John Lebouvre, had conducted a citizenship school a few years earlier in Mound Bayou with some positive outcome. SNCC workers, drawing on the priest's experience, would be needed to recruit and teach in Bolivar and Sunflower Counties. Delta blacks would need help overcoming their learned fear of white officials – another job for the SNCC volunteers.

Should the education and registration process work, newly registered voters would acquire a new sense of dignity and hope. “The further promise lay in the potential for the black community to coalesce into an electoral majority. They could run the Delta.”

The final draft, agreed on by Moses and Moore, was sent to the SNCC office in Atlanta, and Moses returned to his teaching job at the Horace Mann School in New York saving enough money over the year to return to Mississippi the summer of 1961.

Although composed of fewer than 200 college students, SNCC's impact came from the courage of its volunteers. SNCC's strategy stressed grassroots initiatives, development of local leadership, and decentralized decision-making, departing from the more traditional civil rights organizations.

BY MID 1961, the Civil Rights Movement was reaching Mississippi with the arrival of Freedom Rides. As these volunteers moved through the South, challenging segregated bus seating, restaurants, and restrooms in the cities, another murder occurred outside of the Delta in the small town of Liberty.

Farmer Herbert Lee, 52, was shot and killed by E.H. Hurst, a white member of the Mississippi Legislature, on September 25, 1961 in Liberty. Lee was a father of nine children. Hurst was never charged with the crime, and black witnesses were pressured by the sheriff and others to testify that Lee tried to hit Hurst with a tire tool. They testified as ordered and Hurst was acquitted in an Amite County trial held in a room full of armed white men, the same day as the killing. Hurst never spent a night in jail.

One day before Lee's murder, Bob Moses had invited John Doar of the U. S. Department of Justice to McComb to hear directly from blacks involved in the McComb movement, including E. W. Steptoe, the region's NAACP leader, who never left his house unarmed. Steptoe told Doar “Every Negro in Amite County wants to register to vote, but they're just afraid.... If Negroes voted, we wouldn't have any trouble.”<sup>iv</sup>

As organizer of the first local NAACP chapter after reading about *Brown*, Steptoe said that armed whites, led by a deputy sheriff, broke up the group's third meeting. His uncle had been so frightened that he ran into the woods and stayed there for a week, living on raw food. When Steptoe's uncle reappeared, he left the county.

Doar asked Steptoe which white men provoked fear, and Steptoe pointed out his neighbor across the road, Representative Hurst. They had known each other since childhood, but Hurst recently threatened him and several other active NAACP chapter members, including Herbert Lee.

The following morning, Lee drove a truckload of cotton to the Liberty gin, with Hurst following behind in his truck. Hurst parked his truck, rushed to the cab of Lee's truck, and began arguing with Lee, witnesses said.

Hurst drew his gun and thrust it in Lee's face, shouting, "I'm not fooling around this time! I really mean business!" Lee reportedly told Hurst he would talk to him, if he put the gun down. When Hurst lowered the gun, Lee slid into the passenger seat. Then Hurst, cursing, ran to the front of the truck as Lee tried to get out and shot Lee in the head.<sup>v</sup>

Nobody in Liberty would touch [Lee's] body. For the rest of the morning the dead man's body lay sprawled in the dirt where it had fallen. Finally, around noon, somebody convinced a black undertaker in nearby McComb to send a hearse out to the Liberty gin.

A coroner's inquest took place that afternoon where Representative Hurst testified that Lee owed him money and that when he had asked about it, Lee had "come at him with a tire iron." Lee, he said, "had an ungovernable temper."

Hurst further claimed he had walked around the front of the truck to meet the Negro. "I didn't run," he said. "I got no rabbit in me." Hurst explained the .38 he was holding in his other hand had at that moment "accidentally" discharged. "I must have pulled the trigger unconsciously," Hurst swore.<sup>vi</sup>

While the murder was ruled a "justifiable homicide," Doar later observed that Hurst "might have been eager to pick a fight with Lee because Lee had observed Hurst skulking around the parking lot outside a voter registration meeting, jotting down license numbers." Hurst could not have been too upset over the incident, since Mississippi politicians' reputations were often enhanced if they were known to have killed a black man in "self defense."

The night of the murder, Moses returned to Amite County and questioned three black eyewitnesses who testified at the inquest. Two admitted that Sheriff Caston and his deputies coerced them into lying about the tire iron. Lee, only 5 feet, 4 inches, weighed about 150 pounds and had not lifted an arm in self-defense against Hurst, 6-2 and 200 pounds.

"Your sense of isolation was complete," Moses would later recall. "It was very clear you were absolutely on your own when there was not even the possibility of a federal investigation."<sup>vii</sup>

No charges were ever brought against Hurst. One witness to the Lee murder, Lewis Allen, later admitted he lied to protect himself and his family, but he was killed – riddled with buckshot, in his driveway three years later, after reporting that he had been harassed by local police officials several times since the Lee killing. Local authorities said they had "no clues" in the Allen killing. Allen had been a Freedom Rider and was involved in the civil rights movement. On the day he was killed, April 7, 1964, in Liberty, he was making final arrangements to move north.

A later Sovereignty Commission report dated May 7, 1965, noted that FBI special agents George Gunter and Bill Dukes, responding to a complaint from Moses, "investigated the second shooting."<sup>viii</sup>

"It is true that one of the Negroes [Lewis Allen] who testified was later killed by an assassin," reported investigator Tom Scarbrough of the Sovereignty Commission, "but in talking with Sheriff Jones of Amite County, he said that although they were not able to determine definitely who the murderer was, it was suspected a member of the victim's family was the assassin."<sup>ix</sup>

A MISSISSIPPI civil rights milestone was reached in the spring of 1962 as civil rights activists successfully came together throughout the state under the umbrella of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO).

COFO was comprised of representatives were from CORE, SCLC, SNCC and (only because of Medgar Evers' commitment) the NAACP.<sup>x</sup> The newly established Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council, a foundation-based organization that Attorney General Robert Kennedy helped to establish, gave financial support to the new organization.

There was no question that help was needed in Mississippi, since the Citizens Councils and Sovereignty Commission were steadily undermining black voter registration efforts. Commission investigators frequently met with county clerks to keep up with voter registration status and to offer "advice."<sup>xi</sup>

The Sovereignty Commission often worked in conjunction with Citizens Councils, and once Ross Barnett was elected governor in 1960, the Sovereignty Commission began funding Citizens Councils activities with the legislature's approval. Several years later, when a *Councilor* was ultimately convicted of assassinating Medgar Evers, the Commission's files showed how one of its own investigators had earlier tampered with jury selection, suppressed evidence, and intimidated witnesses.<sup>xii</sup>

The Kennedy administration, like Eisenhower's, supported voter registration, but would not offer federal protection to those who tried to register blacks and met with violence, economic harassment or death – as experienced by Herbert Lee and Rev. George Lee.

Between the beatings, jailing and murders of voting rights activists, Mississippi's white supremacists were meeting their objective: during 1962 and 1963, fewer than 4000 black voters were added to the state's rolls, leaving 394,000 black adults in Mississippi unregistered.

SHORTLY AFTER PRESIDENT John F. Kennedy was inaugurated in 1961, two U. S. Justice Department representatives, John Doar and Robert Owens, traveled to the Delta to follow up on human rights campaign promises made by the new President.

Aaron Henry's Fourth Street Drug Store in Clarksdale had become an important gathering place for civil rights and political planning, and in a small room upstairs, Henry along with R.L. Drew, John Melchor, H.Y. Hackett, Mrs. Vera Pigeo and Rev. J. D. Rayford gathered to hear them out.

Henry later wrote he was not sure if anything would come of the meeting, even though Doar was positive: "We had little reason to be optimistic, but we gave them a full report on our problems with voter registration.... We explained that the masses were afraid to take any stand at all or even to express their desire to vote because of the fear of reprisals. Our contention was that this intimidation and the fears associated with the exercise of basic rights were grounds enough for steps by the federal government."<sup>xiii</sup>

Doar agreed: "The government couldn't close the stable door until the horse was stolen," he'd told Henry and others while pointing out that only a federal police force could halt the problem.

"But he promised to do all that he could to help us, and I can say wholeheartedly that Mr. Doar kept his promise," Henry wrote.<sup>xiv</sup>

Doar's first visit paid off; the Justice Department encouraged blacks to take a stand when they were not allowed to register and vote, and then supported their efforts through court action.

Once Doar and the Justice Department made it clear they wanted to learn about every case of discrimination that occurred, Henry and Medgar spent long hours putting Kennedy's representatives in touch with people who had been stopped from voting, gathering enough first-hand information to make it possible for the first court proceedings to be successful.

Henry, like Moore and other black leaders, paid an economic price for his activism. Jobbers would not supply him, forcing him to use a pharmaceutical supplier in Memphis, thus keeping his consumer prices high. The Citizens Council in Clarksdale worked to get Henry's and Melchor's wives fired from their teaching jobs with the Coahoma County School System, Sovereignty Commission files show.<sup>xv</sup>

At least two Citizen Councilors were angry because Henry supported a boycott of merchants who refused to start addressing black customers as "Mr. and Mrs." instead of their first names (or Uncle and Auntie reserved for older blacks): in a 1959 Sovereignty Commission report investigator Zack Van Landingham reported to the director that [John D.] Sullivan, a private detective and former FBI agent and Judge Porter, both members of the Clarksdale Citizens Council, were bringing pressure against Henry, trying to get him to move away, and thus weaken the NAACP.<sup>xvi</sup>

In Clarksdale as elsewhere, Councils were effective with their maneuvers, since leaders were often judges, bankers, physicians, attorneys and business owners. Crawford S. McGivaren, "vice president of the Bank of Clarksdale" was the Council's treasurer and a school board member too, giving him enormous power over Henry and other blacks.<sup>xvii</sup>

Civil rights activists in neighboring Tallahatchie County were also up against tough conditions; no black citizens had been allowed to register to vote in this isolated hill county since Reconstruction. Birdia Keglár and Richard West, working to organize an NAACP chapter there, asked Henry and Evers for help, and this time the Justice Department quickly responded – "a far cry, it seemed, away from the meaningless responses of the Eisenhower administration."<sup>xviii</sup>

Doar used Keglár's experiences to argue the Tallahatchie voting rights case before a federal court in 1961 and the result was invalidation of the county's required test on constitutional interpretation. The registrar was found to be discriminatory in whom he found eligible to vote and an injunction was brought against him. Henry, Doar, and Owens kept working together, obtaining similar injunctions in counties throughout the Delta.<sup>xix</sup>

BIRDIA BEATRICE CLARK KEGLAR, a small and courageous African American woman with piercing eyes, often spoken out against racism, even when she was very afraid to do so. Born June 1, 1908, in the hill country of rural Tallahatchie County, she grew up on land purchased by her mother's early relatives following the Civil War. The land stayed in the family and this was a true source of pride; family members picked their own cotton, grew their own vegetables, and raised their own livestock on this family plot.

"We never picked cotton for other people – just for our family. We had good food to eat and we were fortunate," said Robert Keglár, her son. Birdia was married young, and the marriage did not last. Her husband

left home when Robert was five, so mom and grand-mom raised him, and W. T. Gray, his uncle, played an important role in this family's lives.

This was a family of achievers. Gray, a bright, self-taught teacher, often discussed civil rights at the dinner table. "And this was back in the 1930s," Robert Keglär said, "when black children typically attended small country schools overseen by poorly educated teachers." But the Gray family had a strong tradition of learning and teaching, a skill that Robert's uncle passed on to him.

Birdia Keglär went into business instead of teaching, managing a funeral home in Charleston. Following another family tradition, she was an early civil rights advocate, not easy for any black person of those times, particularly in Tallahatchie County, one of the Delta's strongholds for the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the most violent of the Klan organizations. While most of Mississippi's Klan activity took place in Southern counties, this part of the hill country had members too, in neighboring Leflore, Sunflower, Quitman and other Delta counties.

Birdia Keglär's fighting spirit frequently aroused the attention of Sheriff Ellett R. Dogan, "notorious for his violence to Negroes."<sup>xx</sup> One black Charleston native, a close friend of Keglär's and later the county's NAACP president, described the late sheriff as a "paternalistic man, who sometimes acted like he cared."<sup>xxi</sup>

"Dogan might put his arm around you and tell you not to worry, because there would always be a meal for you and a place to live. But you had to be a *good* Negro to get this kind of treatment from him," Lucy Boyd said.

"When he was bad, he was very bad. And that was how it was most of the time in Charleston. I remember a time when I was younger and a black man accidentally bumped a white woman's arm – just bumped her. This was on the sidewalk, and the woman's husband beat the hell out of the black man. This was not unusual."<sup>xxii</sup>

Boyd, born Lucy Garvin on November 3, 1930, in the hills of Tallahatchie County, told how she became one of Keglär's close friend. "Birdia would say that she was 'supposed to do important things' in her life – and she always was going out to do them. One day I heard her tell several others she was going 'into the Delta' to do something for civil rights – I don't remember exactly what it was, except that she often went places with Amzie Moore over in Cleveland.

"I had two dollars in my purse, and that was a lot of money. I handed it to her and said 'you are probably going to need this.' I thought that I could at least give her something to get some food while she was out there working for the rest of us. I guess I was born to be involved. She was quite surprised. I don't think anyone else had done this for her; it was the beginning of our long friendship."<sup>xxiii</sup>

Birdia became known by the Sovereignty Commission over her voting efforts after investigator Tom Scarbrough visited Charleston on November 17, 1961. The former FBI agent, now working for the state's secret agency, filed a report about "problems" brought on by Keglär, Gray, and S. N. Drake, all voting rights activists.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Sent back to Charleston for details, Scarbrough again met with Dogan, Circuit Clerk Tom Harris, and Judge George Payne Cossar who reported they had been summoned by the Federal Civil Rights "Department" [sic] to appear in Oxford, Mississippi's Federal Court on December 13, a month away, over voting irregularities.

“All three Negroes proffered charges against the two officials alleging they had refused to sell them a poll tax [stamp] and to register them to vote,” Scarbrough reported. Kegljar had tried to pay the required poll tax for ten years, but said she was refused each time by the Sheriff’s department; no one would accept her money. Drake, a retired schoolteacher, made the same complaint, adding the excuse used by Harris in February 1960 was that all of the registration books were in Jackson, Mississippi.

The Circuit Clerk advised Drake that he would let him know when the books were returned but Drake said the clerk never notified him. At the time Drake tried to register, “Birdie Kilger [sic] was with him in the clerk’s office,” Scarbrough reported.

Kegljar’s cousin, Gray, had also complained; at one time, Gray brought Floyd Bodain, David Alford, and Robert Kegljar into the Charleston Courthouse as witnesses.

“All three Negroes charged that they were denied their rights as provided for in the Constitution of the United States.... [But] Mr. Tom Harris, the circuit clerk, said no Negroes have been in to try to register since the early part of 1960 and at that time, he said he did not have a registration blank. He said he was new on his present job and had not received his blank to take applications to register anyone,” Scarbrough dutifully reported.

“Since [Dogan] has been sheriff, no Negro ever requested to pay his poll tax to him. Therefore, he [Harris] said he could not have refused to sell a Negro a poll tax.” As it was, no Tallahatchie black had ever been allowed to register and vote [since Reconstruction], according to Scarbrough.

By the time the Sovereignty Commission agent arrived at the Charleston Courthouse for a second visit over the voter registration issue, those accused had lawyered up. Judge Cossar represented Chief Dogan and Dugan Shands, assistant state attorney general, was helping with both cases.

Cossar had also set up an appointment with State Rep. Walter Sillers (Mississippi’s powerful Speaker of the House) and the three men asked Scarborough to have “someone present from the Sovereignty Commission” at the Oxford hearing on December 13.

In his second report, Scarbrough listed a “situation” with Gray. The sheriff reported that Gray and eight African Americans had testified before a “make believe” civil rights commission hearing at a Methodist Church in Washington, D. C. Close to 2,000 people, black and white, attended the special hearing that drew attention to voting problems faced by African Americans in the South. The event, an “embarrassment” to Mississippi was sponsored by 16 civil rights organizations including the Southern Conference Educational Fund of New Orleans, an organization often “investigated” by the Sovereignty Commission.<sup>xxv</sup>

In Washington, D. C., Gray testified he “tried in vain three times” to pay his poll tax and register, and that he other Negroes were threatened with violence and loss of their jobs if they persisted. “One night my family and I were in the car. We were intimidated for an hour and a half.... After that, I received a letter from the county superintendent that my services would not be required in the coming year.” Gray had taught for twelve years but was fired for speaking at the Washington event.

At the trial in Oxford on December 14, 1961, Birdia Kegljar and John Doar were surprised to learn that she was “already listed” on the Tallahatchie County voters list. The Associated Press (AP) reported:

Shands surprised Mrs. Birdia Keglar during cross-examination of the federal suit which charges that county officials discriminated against Negroes who wanted to vote by refusing to let them pay poll taxes.... State attorneys on December 13 received a list from the federal government of prospective witnesses, including Mrs. Keglar. John Doar, attorney for the Justice Department, said he was "sure Mrs. Keglar would pay her poll tax" because "she's been trying for ten years."<sup>xxvi</sup>

Government attorneys were expected to prove there had been a systematic exclusion of Negroes as voters since Sheriff Dogan took office, and at a preliminary hearing the week before, Judge Claude Clayton of Tupelo ordered the county's officials to turn over all poll tax and voter registration records to government attorneys for inspection, the AP reported.

It was not until June 23, 1964, when Victoria Gray, MFDP member, sued to abolish the certificate of nonpayment of poll tax in order to vote in Mississippi and on October 20, 1964, the District Court granted a permanent injunction.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Meanwhile, with a new sense of vigor coming from winning court cases, Henry and Evers worked long hours on cases of racial brutality or murder, as well as voting rights, obtaining affidavits when possible.

The year before Doar and Owens first went to Clarksdale, a black prisoner died of a stroke in the Clarksdale jail after a severe beating by the police. Henry brought the Louis Stapleton incident to federal authorities, who attempted to get indictments against those responsible in the sheriff's department. The case was never resolved yet such incidents were finally coming into the public eye.

Washington, D. C. might be several thousand miles away, but Henry and Evers could see the Kennedy administration was in sympathy with their problems, and this "was a great morale booster and stimulant for action.... This new wave of action would move us along, but we also knew it would follow the patterns of history and lead to severe reaction and reprisals." Henry's assessment proved true.

AS 1961 CAME to a close, some white folks in Clarksdale were dreaming of a "white" Christmas when they decided to keep their black customers away from the city's annual parade. Their tune changed when Coahoma County's NAACP chapter led by Aaron Henry sponsored a major boycott over the Christmas shopping season of 1961. Downtown stores were all heavily dependent on black trade giving the boycott both immediate and lasting effects.

Evers and Henry had met with President Kennedy over the summer during the NAACP convention in Philadelphia. National board members traveled from Philadelphia to Washington, D. C. on a "freedom train" where they talked with the president and others over the severity of their problems. "President Kennedy listened to us intently, was very cordial, and gave us a tour of the White House," Henry wrote.

Several months later, Clarksdale's mayor decided there would be no Negro participation in the local Christmas parade: his decision would result in the first major confrontation in Clarksdale since 1955.

Aaron Henry and others were stunned and affronted by the mayor's edict. It was tradition for the black band to play at the end of the parade, followed by floats from their community. There seemed to be no

reason for this decision, except that the mayor “apparently resented the progress we were making all over the state,” Henry said.<sup>xxviii</sup>

The announcement came in November and was supported by the Chamber of Commerce. Henry and Evers called for a boycott of downtown stores with the slogan: “If we can’t parade downtown, we won’t trade downtown.” Handbills were printed and a newsletter sent out asking for blacks to join in the boycott; merchants felt pressure from the start.

The white community leaders would not come to terms with the black community and the boycott dragged on. Aaron Henry voiced the black community’s view, when he said it could go on forever unless there were real changes in hiring practices. When the county’s attorney Thomas H. (Babe) Pearson asked Henry to come to his office and talk over the boycott,

We met at his office at seven-thirty the next morning. He told me he knew I was leading the effort, and he wanted to advise me that it was illegal. He read something from a law book but did not explain how it was related to the boycott, and I told him our lawyers had advised us that we were not violating the law, unless we used threats, force, or intimidation to try and make people participate. He finally told me he would put me in jail if I didn’t use my influence to call off the boycott. He gave no explanation of the legal process involved in such an arrest and was clearly relying on his ability to put a Negro in jail anytime he wished. I told him he would have to do just that because I had no intention of calling it off.<sup>xxix</sup>

Aaron Henry would not budge, so Pearson called out for Clarksdale Police Chief Ben Collins to come out from the side room, instructing him to “Take this nigger to jail.” The arrest was illegal, since no warrant was issued, “and I was not committing a crime in their presence, but I knew even better not to argue with an armed policeman. And I didn’t mind going to jail, since I believed it would result in an intensification of the boycott,” Henry observed.

When they got to the jail, Henry was left standing in the lobby because no one was certain whether or not to book him and if so, what charge to press. Then seven more Clarksdale civil rights leaders were brought in and all were locked up, despite the lack of charges.

When Coahoma County Sheriff L.A. Ross arrived at the jail, he was angered over the forced detention and “genuinely outraged at the entire situation.” Ross demanded an explanation from Pearson who told him that the boycott was illegal.

Two hours later, Henry and others were finally charged with restraint of trade and released. After this, the boycott reached its peak. Merchants felt the economic pinch as they missed one-half of their customers. But Pearson had other ideas, and several days later insisted Henry and others be put “under tangible bond” of \$2,000 each awaiting their appearance in court.

Originally, the Clarksdale black leaders were brought to trial in a justice of the peace court and found guilty of restraint of trade. When the county court upheld the conviction, it was appealed to the circuit court, which ruled the petition should be amended or Henry and others would be freed.

But there was no amendment, and Henry and the others were neither acquitted nor found guilty, while the bond money was held. “We were out of jail but unsure of our legal status,” Henry wrote.<sup>xxx</sup>

While Henry and others were being arrested, another group – all white –launched a boycott of their own. The Mississippi State Legislature passed a resolution “with scarcely no dissent” that no loyal Mississippian should shop in Memphis, Tennessee, just across the state line, and quite close to Clarksdale.

Angry because public accommodations and other facilities in Memphis were quietly desegregating, the Mississippi legislature had already “distinguished itself,” wrote Tougaloo professor John Salter, “by publicly investigating conditions at the University Hospital in Jackson, where white and black children were leaving their segregated wards and playing together in the corridors.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

The Clarksdale boycott continued for three years, eventually slowing. Passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act was found to be “a dramatic way of ending it.” Along the way, farm labor mechanization was heading to the Delta and as the need for black laborers lessened, the meanness of whites increased.

Planters and others quite simply wanted blacks to leave the Delta since most were no long needed. Delta whites now viewed black Delta citizens as a social problem, economic deadweight, or worse. Blacks were often described as being “idle, indolent and lacking ambition” and more than ever, they were at risk for race-based acts of vengeance and intimidation. Landowners had somewhat protected their black work force in the past – at least maintaining them at a bare subsistence level. But now, charity or kindness toward blacks became economically counterproductive as black “depopulation” became a regional planning objective.

Blacks were no longer “necessary.” It was finally time for African Americans to go elsewhere, and they were actively encouraged by most of Mississippi’s whites to do so.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Even being mistaken for a civil rights activist could get a person killed. On April 9, 1962 in Taylorsville, Cpl. Roman Duckworth, a military police officer stationed in Maryland, was on leave to visit his sick wife when he was ordered off a bus in by a police officer and shot dead. The police officer may have mistaken Duckworth for a “freedom rider” who was testing bus desegregation laws.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1962, COFO’s voting rights effort was focused on Greenwood, a town of about 15,000 nestled along the banks of the Yazoo River in Leflore County, one county over from the “land of Emmett Till.”

Greenwood existed for cotton. This was where planters got supplies, bought, ginned, stored and sold their cotton. While Greenwood had no true aristocracy, its population included a “precarious wealthy upper class.”<sup>xxxiiii</sup>

The heart of town was *the boulevard*, a row of small mansions built by prosperous planters during World War I, when many left their farms to move into town. While their new homes were mostly imitation English and Spanish architecture, Greenwood was still a metropolis compared to most other Delta towns.

Dennis J. Mitchell, the biographer of Frank E. Smith, a white “liberal” U. S. Congressman from Greenwood in the early 1950s,<sup>xxxv</sup> noted the town “earned its reputation” for being particularly hard on blacks. “One black woman who had lived ‘all over’ the Delta labeled it the meanest town in existence.”

With one of the world’s largest cotton markets, Greenwood could take on the air of a big city. When crops were good, planters demanded and got the best in clothes, automobiles, and travel. Merchants went to

New York for the latest fashions, and smart businessmen sometimes increased prices, counting on snob appeal to sell their wares.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Of Leflore County's 10,000 white people of voting age, 95 percent were registered to vote; of the county's 13,567 eligible black adults, just 2 percent were registered.

The first COFO organizer going into Greenwood was from Cleveland, fifty miles away. Sam Block, who had known Amzie Moore all of his life, could feel the deep fear of Greenwood's blacks who listened as he spoke about voting. These same parents privately told their children to keep away from "that Freedom Rider."<sup>xxxvi</sup> While Block had played an important role in the Cleveland Movement, moving into Greenwood at the behest of SNCC leadership meant taking on an even more difficult agenda in a community that was known to be the home base for the white Citizens Councils and Senator "Big Jim" Eastland.

In Greenwood, even black children were at risk in this cotton center. Late in July, Welton McSwine, a fourteen-year-old, was arrested for "peeping" into the home of a white woman. Greenwood cops took the young man into custody, ordered him to strip, and lashed him with a bullwhip as he lay on the jail cell floor.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

This was not unusual treatment, but Block talked the boy into dictating and signing an affidavit describing what took place for the NAACP. Copies were sent to the FBI and the Justice Department, as well as photographs of the boy's injuries. Federal officials did not respond, but Block's action "won him invaluable points with the black community."<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Block was joined in Leflore County by Wazir Peacock of Charleston, who left Rust College to join the movement. The two had no car and rode around town on a mule, "a sight that probably helped more than anything to endear them to local blacks." Other locals started coming forward to help, including Reverend Aaron Johnson, B.T. McSwine, Robert Burns, Cleveland Jordan, Edward Cochran and Dewey Green.

Later, Peacock remembered difficulties faced in trying to register voters in Leflore County. "Our strategy was to work Leflore County like a wagon-wheel, with Greenwood as the hub, and work out of Greenwood into the surrounding areas. People were very afraid. Some of them, if they saw Sam coming, would avoid him. And enemies would also avoid him-they would come at me instead, they must have seen my knees shaking."<sup>xxxix</sup>

Quickly, city and county officials called in the Sovereignty Commission to aid in harassing voter registration volunteers. In September, investigator Scarbrough attended the trial of Moses and Block, who were arrested along with John O. Hodges, Greenwood High School student body president; Albert Garner, "the leader of a Negro high school band in Greenwood," and Charles R. McLauren for passing out voter registration literature without a permit.<sup>xl</sup> Through his eyes, Scarbrough reported what he "saw."

These same Negroes were tried in City Court in Clarksdale, Mississippi the week before on similar charges. At this trial so many Negroes crowded into the courtroom to lend their moral support to these agitators it was impossible for a white man to get a seat. The situation at this trial in Indianola went in complete reverse to their trial in Clarksdale the previous week, as there were at

least one hundred good, substantial white citizens in the Mayor's Court, whom completely filled up the courtroom before any of the defendants arrived for trial. However, seats were provided for all the defendants, as well as for their attorney, on the front row in the Mayor's office. Promptly at 7:30 all the defendants came into the courtroom with their attorney, Carsie Hall, Negro attorney from Jackson... All of the defendants, as well as their attorney, appeared to be very much set back by the fact that so many white people were in the courtroom who were interested in hearing the trial of this bunch of agitators.<sup>xli</sup>

AS COFO'S numbers increased, one early high school student volunteer, Endesha Ida Mae Holland, was warned by her mother to stay away from the "Righters." Holland, who later earned a doctoral degree and became a playwright, grew up in *Gee Pee*, the "respectable" black Greenwood neighborhood "closer to Main Street and the white folks." Both friends and foe say that Holland often embellished her accounts of the civil rights movement. Nonetheless, her vivid description of *Gee Pee* is probably unmatched:

Its dusty streets were lined with shotgun houses – long, narrow structures that shot back from small porches through the front door, out the back, and across a barren yard to hit the bull's-eye, the outhouse.... The patched streets crumbled at the edges and the potholes overflowed after each summer shower. Few of the houses ever looked finished; some were just less decayed than others ... Black folks in Gee Pee who had some money – schoolteachers, undertakers, and preachers – lived in dark, mustard-colored houses with gas, electric lights, indoor toilets, and pretty knick knacks. We were one of the poorest families in Gee Pee, and our house was a dirty gray. But Mama never failed to remind us "Member now, you livin' in Gee Pee, not Baptist Town nor Gritney!"<sup>xlii</sup>

Her early years were rough. Holland was expelled from high school and turned to prostitution and shoplifting before her introduction to SNCC by Sam Block. Holland helped with clerical work but also took part marches and protests in the later 1960s, being beaten and jailed.<sup>xliii</sup>

COFO and SNCC leaders and volunteers had their hands full. Greenwood was supposed to be a showcase project, but after several months, only a small number of new voters were actually registered. As Block and Peacock had pointed out, Greenwood had a certain level of terror, making it difficult to register voters. Lawrence Guyot, a SNCC volunteer, who came to Leflore County from Tougaloo College, explained:

We were dealing with people who knew exactly where we are, what we were doing, and that's the level of terror that we operated in. But despite that, we settle in Greenwood. We move around. We identify who the potential leaders are. We work with them. We get voter registration demonstrations going. And I walk up to the chief of police one day, and I say, "Look, I want to meet with you later on, you know, working out some agreements about no arrests when we take people to register to vote." He said, "Fine." Within two hours, thirty-eight of us are arrested and taken to Parchman Prison, where we spend two months, naked without any bunks, any sheets, or

what have you. We sleep on steel cots and that's the way that happens.... the only reason we get out of there is because there is sixty-eight of us. Some have been arrested in Itta Bena because a fire bomb was thrown into the church there. Instead of arresting the people who threw the firebomb in, the people who were in the church are arrested.<sup>xliv</sup>

By 1962, there had been a definite shift in the strategy of the Civil Rights Movement, with SNCC representing a more pro-active stance. James Farmer, a leader of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), offered his insight on how this transformation partly came about:

I was in jail in Mississippi. Bobby Kennedy called a meeting of CORE and SNCC in his office. I could not be there, of course. I was in the clink. But several people from CORE went. And several from SNCC went, just those two because they were the activist groups in the freedom rides. This was the summer of '61 and at that meeting what Bobby said to them according to the reports, he said, "Why don't you guys cut out all that shit Freedom Riding and sitting-in shit, and concentrate on voter education." Says "If you do that I'll get you a tax exemption." The SNCC guy almost hit him.... "Tell us that we concentrate on voter registration when we're fighting a tiger down there, in Mississippi and Alabama. You're trying to buy us off."<sup>xlv</sup>

As in most Delta communities, initial local support of SNCC came from Greenwood's young and from the uneducated. Some joined because they were interested in freedom, and others found participation a way of challenging parents or even getting thrown out of school. Soon, country people who were tired of making crops for white plantation owners were soon joining others from Gee Pee, Gritney and Baptist Town – "in other words, people who thought they had nothing to lose – were quick to join, too."<sup>xlvi</sup>

Often, those with education or a good job such as teachers, were hesitant to rock the boat, since once a person was tagged as a "Righter," they were perceived as dangerous by the rest of the community, according to Holland and others. In most schools, principals suspended or expelled any students who participated in a demonstration and teachers dare not be involved, unless they worked in secret. Teachers were also forced to sign "loyalty oaths" or they would be fired. (Years later, Jeanette Cunningham told Holland that her teacher at Stone Street School took a risk by telling students to get up and look out the window during a march so they could watch history while it was being made.)

"Brothers lied to brothers, and daughters lied to mothers. Friends and relatives who betrayed them thought of themselves as protecting their families. Some local blacks even curried favor with the police by tipping them off about SNCC's movements and plans, often for a 'reward' of several dollars."<sup>xlvii</sup>

Greenwood was not alone in white opposition to the Delta campaign. Ruleville's mayor, C. M. Dorrough, represented many Delta whites who for all accounts were "unmatched in their belligerence and resistance to change."

"We gonna see how tight we can make it," Dorrough warned, after learning of COFO's plans that would bring voting rights workers into other towns besides Greenwood, including his own

"Gonna make it just as tight as we can, it's gonna be rougher, rougher than you think it is."<sup>xlviii</sup>

On August 29, SNCC field secretary Charles McLaurin accompanied a busload of black plantation workers from Ruleville to the Sunflower County courthouse in Indianola. The plantation workers from Ruleville were allowed to fill out voter registration forms, but none did so to the registrar's satisfaction and were not allowed to register.

Leaving Indianola, a highway car stopped the bus and fined the driver a hundred dollars for driving a bus with "too much yellow in it," meaning it too closely resembled a school bus. Clearly, this was harassment, since the same bus was used for years to haul plantation workers back and forth across the county.

By the time Fannie Lou Hamer arrived back to her plantation home, owner B. D. Marlowe was waiting for her, "blazing mad." If she would not remove her name from the list of people attempting to register, he warned would fire her and her husband, Pap, as well. Mrs. Hamer stated she did not go to Indianola to register for him, but to register for herself and so she was ordered off the plantation.

Less than two weeks later, on September 10, night riders raided Ruleville's black neighborhood, looking for Mrs. Hamer.<sup>xlix</sup>

Witnesses saw a black sedan speed into the area along Reden Avenue shortly after midnight. A white man was observed leaning from the car with a shotgun fired at several homes before heading away towards Drew. Two young women, Marylou Burke and Vivan Hilly, were not involved in the movement but were in Ruleville waiting for a bus ride to Jackson. In the wrong place at the wrong time, they were shot at and hit, nevertheless.

Both were taken to a local hospital where Burke was declared in critical condition with a head wound. As COFO people huddled near the intensive-care part of the hospital, C. M. Dorrough, the Ruleville mayor, ordered the arrest of Charlie Cobb, an activist, on suspicion of being the sniper.

"I think y'all shot at those houses," Dorrough asserted to Cobb. "You were disappointed at the lack of violence here, and you need the publicity to get money from the North."<sup>1</sup>

LEFLORE COUNTY WHITES running the federal Surplus Food Program began withholding food as punishment for increased civil rights activities; food was being held back in other Delta counties as well. Hardliners on the county's Board of Supervisors were determined to halt distribution of all federal food commodities to the county's poor – of which 98 percent were black.

"To the traditional segregationist arsenal of intimidation, economic reprisal, beatings, lynching, and legal brutality, Leflore County appeared ready to add genocide. Leflore County whites, it seemed, would starve black children to death before they would allow their parents to vote."<sup>ii</sup>

Most poor people, black and white, were dependent on commodities for the cheese, flour, milk, rice, beans and canned meats, critical in feeding families in Greenwood and outlying districts. The county's decision meant that more than twenty-two thousand farm and sharecropping families would be affected – families that had relied on the commodities to make it from one cotton harvesting season to the next.

The scope of potential starvation and malnutrition did not draw attention outside of Mississippi – a news article appeared in the *Jackson Press* that discounted the decision as a "simple debate over regional welfare practices." Others declared the black families were "freeloaders" who wanted "something for

nothing.” In the same year, Mississippi drew some \$750 million in U. S. government funds, with millions of federal dollars going into the Delta as agricultural subsidies to cotton farmers.

There were predictions of wholesale starvation in the Delta. Mothers about to give birth were particularly concerned about the consequences. Fannie Lou Hamer pointed out it was the labor and sweat of blacks that had “made them white folks creamy rich,” and concluded: “There’s so much hate. Only God has kept the Negro sane.”<sup>lii</sup>

The Ku Klux Klan and the Citizens Council, working to halt any more blacks from registering to vote, pressured the county officials into stopping food distribution and locking up the commodities, in the first place. This practice continued in the Delta as late as 1966, according to Sovereignty Commission records and oral histories. Yet, Sovereignty Commission records show continued attempts by white leaders to “prove” there was no starvation in the Delta.

As starvation worsened and word of the food cabal moved outside of Mississippi, two black students from Michigan State University, Ivanhoe Donaldson and Ben Taylor, tried to bring a pickup truck filled with food and clothing into Greenwood in December of 1962, challenging the Leflore County supervisors “strike” against federal assistance to poor people.

Coahoma County officers said the truck’s medical supplies – bandages and aspirin – were dangerous contraband and arrested the Michigan visitors. Police impounded the truck and locked the two in the city jail. The Michigan men were terrified and after several days were finally able to slip a note to Aaron Henry, who arranged for their bail.

They were lucky. Six months earlier, attorney Bill Higgs was arrested in Coahoma County for driving an integrated vehicle. While in his cell, Higgs ran into an “overlooked” black Freedom Rider from California who was languishing in the Clarksdale jail. Law student Dewey Peterson had been arrested during the summer of 1961 as he tried to integrate the city’s bus depot. He was held incommunicado in Clarksdale for nearly a year before Higgs found him, by chance. The attorney was able to get Peterson bailed out.<sup>liii</sup>

The county’s attempt to use starvation against blacks unexpectedly helped COFO and SNCC become entrenched in the area, attracting more supporters among local blacks, particularly after November, when a black child died of starvation.

Justice Department lawyers and reporters came in and toured the county, urged to do so by COFO, to find “shocking health conditions and dire shortages of milk and other staples in black homes.”

In a letter that Moses wrote to a friend back home, he told of finishing a bowl of soup and seeing a “black, leathery hand reach over from behind him and fumble for a remnant of the meal.”

National interest was aided by Harry Belafonte, who responded with a relief concert in New York City, and Dick Gregory, who chartered a plane to personally deliver emergency rations to Greenwood.

Recognition from the outside brought new optimism among SNCC workers, who worked longer days at bigger risks. Milton Hancock, a black Greenwood cab driver who hauled around freedom workers for free, was stopped by a deputy on a traffic violation and told to get out of town – “You know what happened to Emmett Till!” he was warned.<sup>liv</sup>

A few months later, SNCC gave out four tons of food in just one day – a record. Then four black-owned businesses in Greenwood were firebombed. Sam Block, giving a press conference on the smoldering

ruins, was arrested and charged with “inciting a riot.” Five days later, one hundred workers and supporters marched on Greenwood City Hall in protest. This was a bold demonstration, for the times, stunning both white and black communities. But the police chief was out of town, and the march dispersed, according to Holland.

On the night of February 28, 1963, Moses, Randolph Blackwell, an attorney with the Voter Education Project, and Jimmy Travis, a former Tougaloo student working with voter registration, met at the SNCC office in Greenwood. While they were talking over plans, Travis stood guard at the window.

A late-model Buick slowly cruised by the office with three white men inside. The car had no tags. When Travis reported this, someone confirmed the car had shown up several times that day. The meeting broke up early, in case there was trouble.

Moses, Travis, and Blackwell left for Greenville at nine-thirty that night, heading west through Itta Bena and Indianola. On Highway 82, the mysterious car appeared in the rearview mirror and Travis, the driver, pulled into a dark street to go around a city block before picking up the main road.

They returned to the highway, with no sign of the Buick, but several miles down the road bright headlights came up from behind. As Travis accelerated, Moses had time to notice the men in the car wore sunglasses. Then automatic rifle fire tore into the driver’s side of the car and Travis was shot.

Moses took over the wheel as the Buick sped away toward Itta Bena. Travis was critically wounded from a shot in the neck. When Greenville doctors told him the operation to remove the bullet would be a risk, Travis insisted on being taken to a hospital in Jackson, his hometown. There, doctors successfully removed the bullet.

Leflore County Sheriff John Ed Cothern investigated the incident and told an Associated Press reporter the Travis car “had holes in it but it had not been determined if they were bullet holes.”<sup>lv</sup> Thirteen bullet holes were actually counted.

One day after the shooting, Wiley Branton from the Voter’s Education Project or VEP asked for all voter registration workers in Mississippi to converge on Greenwood to demonstrate there would be no backing down.

Branton, a descendant of Greenwood Leflore, a French-Choctaw millionaire planter for whom the county and town were named, told the press that Leflore County, Mississippi, had selected itself “as the testing ground for democracy, and we shall meet the challenge there.”<sup>lvi</sup>

SNCC leader Moses called for a month-long “saturation campaign” to register black voters in Leflore County. Cables and letters were also sent to political and media figures, to the President, his brother, and state Governor, Barnett. But a wave of violence swept Greenwood as whites responded to the increased numbers of civil rights workers coming into their town. A car parked in front of the Greenwood SNCC office had its windows blown out by a shotgun. The building where the COFO office was located was bombed and everything was destroyed, including voter registration records. There was “no evidence of arson,” authorities said.

Then another car was hit by bullets as night riders fired shots into the home of Greenwood volunteers, including Dewey Green, after his son, Dewey Jr., announced he was going to enroll at Ole Miss, following

Meredith's footsteps. Both Green and his son had been under the eye of the Sovereignty Commission on several occasions pertaining to school applications and voter registration issues.

National news reports brought attention to the sheriff's ineffective efforts to track down vigilantes behind these attacks and on March 27, 1963, less than a month after the Travis shooting, Moses staged a new march on City Hall, this time bringing in James Forman, SNCC's executive secretary, from national offices in Atlanta.

Forman, 34, had lived most of his life as a native of Holly Springs and could trace his ancestry back to the New Africa community. Seen as a scholarly and forceful activist, he was one of Moses' most important mentors. In the 1950s, Forman wrote an unpublished novel about a cadre of black young people who became politicized and staged a nonviolent revolution in the Deep South. Like Moses, Forman left a Northern teaching career to join the Southern movement.

Forman, Moses, and six others were arrested during the march. Then reporters for several national publications – *Newsweek* reporter Karl Fleming, and Claude Sitton of *The New York Times* – were surrounded by a gang and roughed up, for the reason their coverage was “not good PR for the segregationists' cause.” Greenwood police – confronting the two leaders – had attempted to disperse the marchers using the town's one German shepherd police dog: “[H]undreds of white bystanders lined the curb, cursing and urging the cops to unleash the dog.”<sup>lvii</sup>

Aaron Henry followed the march in his car, picking up a hobbling minister who was bitten in the calf by the dog. Greenwood's Police Commissioner, B.A. “Buff” Hammond, told reporters that Rev. D. L. Tucker was not seriously injured by the dog, but a report to Robert Kennedy stated that Tucker suffered “shock and injuries” from the bite. A CBS cameraman, also arrested, had his film of the incident confiscated.

Some Northern reporters questioned mistreatment of the cameraman in an interview with the city's mayor, Charles Sampson, who gave a weak excuse: “They [the police] had a report up there that them niggers was going to the Alice Café for a sit-in.”

The mayor gave newsmen his impression of a “great civil rights conspiracy” being imposed on the people of Mississippi by marchers and voter registration workers who were being manipulated from afar by Bobby Kennedy. He and other city officials knew for a fact, he related, that civil rights workers in Greenwood regularly called the Justice Department in Washington – collect.<sup>lviii</sup>

From jail, Moses refused bail, escalating the situation in hopes of involving the U. S. Department of Justice; he wanted Bobby Kennedy to file a writ of habeas corpus to get the seven SNCC prisoners released from jail. But Kennedy would only file for a restraining order in federal court, demanding that Greenwood release the protesters and stop interfering with their peaceful marches. Judge Claude Clayton, a native Mississippian, flatly refused to issue the injunction.

Other leaders stepped in. James Farmer, executive director of CORE, and comedian Dick Gregory led a demonstration at the county courthouse on April 2. Gregory had already made major donations of food and money, putting himself in the direct line of fire, and had “found it impossible to stay away from the beset community.” The comedian knew he was at risk by coming into Greenwood. Yet he would take on the cops:

“There's your story,” Gregory announced loudly to newsmen at the scene of a courthouse demonstration, “guns and sticks for old women who want to register.”<sup>lix</sup>

Gregory found Mississippi police reminiscent of the Old West and began walking around Greenwood wearing a white cowboy hat. Poking fun at the police was something new for local blacks to see firsthand, and this won their admiration.

Arrested after smarting off to the police, Gregory was carried away in a squad car and then released at the courthouse, when officers were warned he was a celebrity. As the comedian figured, the police would not give him the publicity of beating him up or arresting him, so Gregory became even more outspoken:

“Look at them,” he announced, within earshot of the police, “a bunch of illiterate whites who couldn’t even pass the test themselves.” The cops appeared more shocked than insulted. To white men accustomed to the submissiveness of Delta blacks, Dick Gregory must have seemed like “something from a bad dream.”<sup>x</sup>

On June 11 a message came into the Greenwood SNCC office that a group of eight freedom workers – Fannie Lou Hamer, June Johnson, Annelle Ponder, Euvester Simpson, Rosemary Freeman, Lawrence Guyot, James Wes, and Ruth Day – had been arrested and beaten by Winona jailers in Montgomery County for integrating the white waiting room of the bus station in Winona upon returning from a training session in South Carolina on June 9, 1963.

Moses led a group of SNCC volunteers that night to Winona. Though she could hardly talk, Annelle Ponder whispered, “Freedom,” when she saw her friends. Cat Holland observed that June Johnson’s face was “so smashed and bloody I didn’t recognize her.” Then Holland saw Hamer, who according to Holland “took her hand and ran it over her lumpy, bruised flesh,” while telling the young woman what happened:

“Why y’all beat ‘em like this?” I asked the policeman, who stood by leering.

*“We kin give you some of the same thing,” he said.*

“Don’t say nothing, Ida,” Miss Hamer said. “You go back an’ tell the others.”

I left the Winona jail in tears, feeling hopeless. When we got back to the Freedom Office, I was urged to write down everything I had seen. I was afraid to tell Mama what had happened, but she could tell it was serious from the look on my face. We went to bed but I couldn’t sleep. Even counting roaches didn’t help. When I finally dozed, I . . . woke up bathed in a sweat.<sup>xi</sup>

Outside, dawn was breaking to the sound of blowing auto horns and a person banging on Holland’s screen door. The news was horrible. Medgar Evers was dead – assassinated in the early morning hours of June 12 in front of his family at his Jackson home, only hours after President Kennedy had given an important civil rights speech to the nation, calling for an end to hostilities.

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<sup>i</sup> Cagin & Dray, 160.

<sup>ii</sup> Barbara Ransby, “Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement, A Radical Democratic Vision,” (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2003), from the Introduction.

<sup>iii</sup> Cagin and Dray, 162.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*, 184. The shooting scene description and dialogue were compiled by the authors from: Moses, Doar, and McDew interviews in *The New York Times*, October 11 and 24, 1961; Zinn, and others.

<sup>vi</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>viii</sup> Mississippi Sovereignty Commission file(s) SCR ID # 2-60-0-48-1-1-1; SCR ID # 2-141-0-19-1-1-1; SCR ID # 3-32A-0-37-1-1-1.

<sup>ix</sup> Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission file(s) SCR ID # 2-140-3-45-1-1-1; SCR ID # 2-55-5-57-2-1-1; SCR ID # 2-55-5-74-2-1-1; SCR ID # 2-55-5-76-2-1-1. More often than not, such murders were blamed on families, friends, other blacks, etc. many of the state many state citizens.

<sup>x</sup> National NAACP leaders did not encourage other civil rights organizations’ involvement in Mississippi and were leery of COFO.

<sup>xi</sup> Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, “Document: Desoto, Tunica, Coahoma, Bolivar and Sunflower Counties,” March 22, 1961.

<sup>xii</sup> Woods, 154. See records from the Sovereignty Commission, SCR ID # 1-77-0-19-1-1-1.

<sup>xiii</sup> Henry, 104-105.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>xv</sup> Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission file(s) SCR ID # 1-16-1-27-1-1-1.

<sup>xvi</sup> Sovereignty Commission report filed by Zack Van Landingham, June 26, 1959, SCR ID # 1-16-1-21-1-1-1.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>xix</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xx</sup> From a “scouting” report on the First congressional District probably written by a COFO or SNCC representative; found in Sovereignty Commission files. No date.

<sup>xxi</sup> While Dogan died years ago, his very elderly wife still goes to work each day in the sheriff’s office, answering the phones and serving as receptionist.

<sup>xxii</sup> Interview with Lucy Boyd, summer of 2004.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Telephone Interview conducted February 10, 2005, by Susan Klopfer with Lucy Boyd.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission file(s) SCR ID # 2-92-0-15-1-1-1; SCR ID # 4-0-1-68-1-1-1; SCR ID # 2-92-0-15-2-1-1.

<sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid.*; Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission file(s) SCR ID # 2-92-0-15-3-1-1.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Unidentified newspaper clipping, Sovereignty Commission. SCR ID # 4-0-1-69-1-1-1

<sup>xxvii</sup> See Civil Liberties Docket, X, 52, 118, at 501. Miss. 17. Jennifer McDowell, “Black Politics: A study and an Annotated Bibliography of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party,” 1971, 32.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Henry/Currie, 111-112.

<sup>xxix</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xxx</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>xxxi</sup> John Salter, “Jackson, Mississippi,” (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1979), 29.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Cagin and Dray, 220.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Dennis J. Mitchell, “Mississippi Liberal: A Biography of Frank E. Smith,” (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi for the Mississippi Historical Society,” 2001), 15.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> According to biographer Dennis J. Mitchell, Smith (1918-1997) grew up in the Delta. After serving in World War II, he founded a liberal newspaper in Greenwood. Then “to heighten his chances for winning a seat in the state senate, he lied about his liberal views

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on race.” After being elected to the U. S. Congress, Smith quietly worked for integration, Mitchell writes. “For openly supporting John F. Kennedy’s bid for the Presidency, Smith lost the congressional seat he had held for thirteen tumultuous but productive years.” Eventually, Smith served as a special assistant to Governor William F. Winter.

xxxv Ibid.

xxxvi Cagin and Dray, 221. Early in the Mississippi civil rights movement, blacks confused community organizers and activists with freedom riders or “riders.”

xxxvii This name also appears as “Walter” McSwine in a UPI story dated August 16, 1962. A copy of the story was filed by the Sovereignty Commission, SCR ID # 10-52-0-21-1-1-1.

xxxviii Ibid., 222. Cites Southern Regional Council Archives, Atlanta University Library.

xxxix Wazir (Willie) Peacock, Civil Rights Movement Veterans website, 1999 – 2005.

xl In 1965, MFDP was involved in civil rights demonstrations in which 1100 whites and blacks were arrested for failure to get permits to distribute handbills and parade. Plaintiffs sued in District Court for anti ordinance injunction that was denied. On February 14, 1967, the 5<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals held the handbill ordinance violated the First and Fourteenth Amendments and parade ordinance void due to vagueness. Civil Liberties Docket, XIII, 15, at 51. Miss. 4. (Source: Black Politics, Legal Cases, 33.)

xli Sovereignty Commission, September 7, 1962, SCR ID # 2-38-1-45-1-1-1.

xlii Endesha Ida Mae Holland, Ph.D., “From the Mississippi Delta, a Memoir,” (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 19-21.

xliii Ibid., 20.

xliv Oral history with Lawrence Guyot, September 7, 1996, interviewed by John Rachel, a cooperative project of USM Libraries and USM's Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage.

xlv Woods, 11. Cites Aldon D. Morris, “The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change,” (New York: Free Press, 1984), 234-5.

xlvi Ibid., 218.

xlvii Holland.

xlviii Ibid., 221. Cites *Mississippi Free Press*, December 8, 1962.

xlix Cagin and Dray, 226.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 227.

li “We Are Not Afraid,” 226.

lii Ibid., 228.

liii Ibid., 229.

liv Holland, 220.

lv “Negro Voting Leader Shot,” *The Associated Press*, March 1, 1963. From Mississippi Sovereignty Commission files, SCR ID # 1-74-0-4-1-1-1.

lvi Henry, 139.

lvii Cagin and Dray, 233.

lviii Ibid., 234-235.

lix “We Are Not Afraid, 236.

lx Ibid., 236.

lxi Holland.