

## Chapter 23 Dee' lay

It was a sloppy thing to do. Byron de la Beckwith, usually quite fastidious, left his fingerprint on the gun he used to kill Medgar Evers and then tossed it in the bushes 150 feet from the site of the shooting.

Several witnesses could even place the small, dark-haired man in his victim's neighborhood that night, but the Klansman and Citizens Council member denied the shooting, at least to the police, saying his gun had been stolen. De la Beckwith (pronounced Dee'lay to his friends, with an accent on the first syllable) was supported by two witnesses who claimed he was sixty miles away from Medgar Evers' home on the night Evers was killed.

One theory quietly floated around Mississippi on how Beckwith's fingerprint was actually discovered: FBI agents had pinpointed a Citizens Council member in Jackson, rumored to have played a role in planning the assassination. Agents in New York approached "Julio" ("reputedly [the] alleged mobster named Gregory Scarpa") and offered him a deal:

If he would perform some dirty work for them, and pinpoint who killed Evers, they would ensure his release in an upcoming interstate flight case. In this scenario, Scarpa drove to Jackson and abducted the Council member, and an FBI agent drove them into Louisiana, to an isolated house deep in a bayou. After Scarpa pistol-whipped the man and shoved a pistol in his mouth, the captured Citizens Council member gave Beckwith's name in a signed statement. Scarpa, in fact, walked away from the interstate flight charge.<sup>i</sup>

Regardless, Jackson's FBI team had already been picking up information about Beckwith from other sources. Special agent Tom Van Riper recalled that Klan informants and Citizens Council informants had come up with Beckwith's name as the probable assassin. Riper heard that Beckwith had bragged that he killed "that nigger" and was saying things like, "It was no different killing Medgar Evers than shooting a mad dog." Beckwith was letting people know that he was proud of what he had done.<sup>ii</sup>

### *'Relative' Angers Greenwood Judge*

Margaret Block's mother told her daughter that she saw Byron De La Beckwith only hours after he murdered Medgar Evers. "She worked for the family of Judge Ed Green, a circuit judge who was of the Green family in Greenwood.

The morning after Medgar Evers was killed, she was cooking their breakfast when one of the judge's shirt-tail relatives brought Beckwith to his home.

The judge got angrier than my mother had ever seen him become and he sent them all on their way. Then Judge Green called another relative to ask why they'd sent "that dirty SOB" to his home.

Judge Green was so mad, in fact, he didn't eat his breakfast, but stormed out of the house, my mother told me. He was a good man – he used to secretly give my mother [Alma Block] money to give to Amzie Moore for the civil rights movement.

At a Klan training session, Rev. Delmar Dennis (principal FBI underground operative in the Ku Klux Klan) and other Klansmen allegedly heard Beckwith say that killing Evers “gave me no more inner discomfort than our wives endure when they give birth to our children. We ask them to do that for us. We should do just as much. So, let's get in there and kill those enemies, including the President, from the top down!”<sup>iii</sup>

Van Riper was the agent who often spoke to Evers when the civil rights leader called the FBI to report threats and harassment, and it was his opinion that “Medgar Evers was a dead man walking around. That was the consensus. And there was nothing we could do ... to protect him.

“He was either a very brave man – and maybe he didn't even think about his bravery, if he *was* brave – or he was a very stupid man. Because he definitely was a marked man. And I think if Byron de la Beckwith hadn't murdered him, he would have been murdered in any case, by someone else ... [but] there is no question in my mind that Byron de la Beckwith murdered Medgar Evers.”<sup>iv</sup>

Beckwith, a “notorious white supremacist ... believed it was his god-given mission to uphold the racial purity of the old-plantation South,” wrote Reed Massengill in *Portrait of a Racist*. Massengill's uncle was also sexually impotent.<sup>v</sup>

As a child, Massengill recalled how he found his uncle's name fascinating, just by itself. Once after asking his grandmother about Beckwith's name she kept written in a family Bible, Massengill learned: “He was your Aunt Mary's husband.” Massengill's grandmother died in 1973; he requested and received the clippings about Beckwith that were among her papers. Several months later, in September 1973, Beckwith was arrested while carrying a live bomb into Louisiana:

For the first time, I clipped the article from *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* myself. I was fascinated by this man, his mysterious relationship with my Aunt Mary, and his apparent estrangement from my family. Eighteen years later, on January 30, 1991, I carried that battered file folder full of yellowed clippings with me when I went to visit my former uncle, Byron de la Beckwith, in jail.<sup>vi</sup>

Nine years before killing Evers, Beckwith heard Judge Tom Brady “analyze” the *Brown* decision in a Greenwood meeting of the Sons of the American Revolution. Brady said the Negro was “lower than a chimpanzee” and that the federal government “wanted a race war in Mississippi.” Beckwith listened to every word spit out by Brady. Then he joined Greenwood's Citizens Council and passed out leaflets against integration.

Professor James Silver, in the same year of Evers' death, wrote that white Mississippians (like Beckwith) were obsessed with the past, but saw legend rather than history. This mythic vision of one's life was essential to maintenance of white supremacy.<sup>vii</sup>

And so obsessed was Beckwith with his “important connections” that stretched back to his grandmother, Susan Southworth Yerger, who was “friendly” with Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, that he still owned a thank-you note from the Davis family to his grandmother, as well as some Davis family china she’d inherited.<sup>viii</sup>

Greenwood’s *Commonwealth* newspaper once published a neighborly picture of Beckwith displaying these pieces for the camera, describing the picture “for all the world the harmless local antiquarian.”

Beckwith had traced his family back to William the Conqueror. Born Byron de la Beckwith VI on November 9, 1920, in Sacramento, California, he was the only child of Byron V and Susie Yerger. The San Francisco businessman met Yerger, an “emotionally disturbed spinster,” when she was visiting California on a rest cure.<sup>ix</sup> When Byron Beckwith was five, his father died of alcoholism and pneumonia in a sanatorium leaving his family a quarter of a million dollars in debt.<sup>x</sup>

Susie Yerger Beckwith had moved back to Greenwood to be with her family. She and her son settled in the old three-story home on George Street built by his Confederate grandfather Lemuel. Beckwith’s mother was of fragile health and died of cancer when her son was eleven leaving her young son to be raised by his Uncle Will and his mother’s cousin, a young lawyer named Yerger Moorehead. Another relative, Holmes Southworth, his mother’s cousin, sometimes helped raise Byron de la Beckwith. He was not really wanted by “those three old bachelor uncles,” Beckwith once told Burris Dunn, an old friend.<sup>xi</sup>

After the War, Beckwith married a direct descendant of Roger Williams of Rhode Island who “fancied herself something of an aristocrat.” They returned to Greenwood, and Beckwith began working as a clerk, soon taking a series of sales jobs. He was known to be good in this profession.

“He could talk to anybody, sell anybody anything,” an old boss told a reporter in 1963. But Vincent Cascio remembered his employee’s darker side. “Sometimes, there were eruptions against blacks – “a mention of Negroes would send him into a rage.”

The rages quickened as the 1950s progressed and then suddenly after *Brown*, “[H]is life was filled with a purpose; here was escape from the demeaning salesman’s life,” Massengill wrote. “He talked *Black Monday* breakfast, lunch and dinner.”<sup>xii</sup>

Beckwith threw himself into the activities of Greenwood’s Citizens Council, often using the word “rabid” to describe himself as Greenwood’s most fervent on the race issue. “It is sinful for me to waist [sic] my talents and energies as a tobacco salesman when I could, by the stroke of your pen, be placed in a position of great usefulness to our state and nation,” he’d written to Gov. J. P. Coleman in May 1956, requesting a spot on the new Sovereignty Commission.”<sup>xiii</sup>

Following the Medgar Evers assassination, while the Greenwood establishment “staunchly stood by [Beckwith],” civil rights demonstrations grew more defiant; demonstrations also moved into the Delta. Greenville had its first sit-in and Hodding Carter wrote for *The New York Times Magazine*: “The attitudes of people on both sides of the racial struggle were hardening,” and there was a widespread “fantastic belief in an eventual and inevitable showdown” as “hate and fear were the two emotions that possessed Mississippians.”<sup>xiv</sup>

The Carters had shivered themselves, after hearing of Beckwith's arrest. Delay, as his friends called him (emphasizing the first syllable), worked for the same fertilizer company in Greenwood as young John Keating, a friend of the Carter family.

When Beckwith learned Keating knew the Carters, he'd asked the teenager questions about the layout of the Carter home, their alarm system, and "a good way to get behind their house."

Beckwith had bragged he was going to kill Hodding Carter. No one ever shot at the Carter house, but there were times when people would drive up their driveway and honk their horns. Hodding Carter had taken all threats seriously: "He aroused venomous ire," remembered Roy Campbell, president of Greenville's school board in the fifties.<sup>xv</sup>

When the FBI crime lab in Washington matched a fingerprint from the gun's scope against prints found in Beckwith's military records (a "fourteen points" match), Byron de la Beckwith turned himself in "late in the night of June 23, in [Hardy] Lott's office in downtown Greenwood." Lott, past president of the white Citizens Council in Greenwood, was Beckwith's principal lawyer.

It would be that five months after the assassination of Medgar Evers, President John F. Kennedy was shot dead on November 22, 1963, in Dallas. Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson was immediately sworn in as President and advocated passing civil rights legislation on November 27, 1963. But legislation moves slowly and eventually 1963 came to an end.

The first trial of Byron de la Beckwith for the murder of Medgar Evers – there were three – opened January 27, 1964 in Jackson, packing the Jackson courtroom for eight days. Beckwith did his best to act aloof and despite a "vigorous and unrelenting prosecution" by the state's attorney, William L. Waller, a seventh-generation Mississippian, Beckwith went free after a mistrial was declared. An all-white Hinds County jury deadlocked. On April 17, a second mistrial was declared when another all-white jury did the same thing.

Not until 1994, when new evidence linked him directly to Evers' murder, was a new trial called and Beckwith was convicted and sentenced to life in prison, where he died in 2001.

When Sovereignty Commission files were finally made public, after a twenty-two-year fight, it was confirmed the Commission had tampered with jury selection in the first trial.<sup>xvi</sup> The Beckwith trial had been a key event in 1964, but so much else also happened that year....

BY VIRTUE OF being in the most oppressive state of the 1960s South, Evers was the natural target of white supremacists, and Beckwith made certain his assassination was carried out. But was Beckwith alone? There were immediate rumors of conspiracy running throughout Mississippi that Beckwith was "only a pawn," and that others "higher up" ordered the assassination. Further, COINTELPRO was already well underway, further leaving Evers in a precarious position.<sup>xvii</sup>

Years later, prosecutor Bobby DeLaughter, as he prepared to take Beckwith into court, once again, learned from an FBI agent that Beckwith told his cellmate at Angola (where Beckwith was serving a short sentence for a bombing) that a Klansman named "Smith"<sup>xviii</sup> ordered the Evers hit.<sup>xix</sup>

While cooperating with the FBI on another case, Lester Paul Hockman, incarcerated in an undisclosed federal facility, told Agent Daniel Lund that he possessed critical information regarding Beckwith's assassination of Medgar Evers.

Although Hockman had lived most of his life in another part of the country, his work as a carpenter had carried him to New Orleans, Louisiana. The report stated that in 1978 he was convicted and incarcerated for a shooting. Assigned for several weeks to clean the receiving unit at Angola Penitentiary, Hockman claimed to have met Beckwith, who was serving time on [a] New Orleans charge.

Hockman told agent Lund that "Beckwith liked him because both were of German descent and talked freely to him." Beckwith frequently spoke of a person he greatly admired named Smith [not the real name]. Hockman recalled seeing the name on some of the Klan literature that Beckwith kept in his cell. Smith, according to Hockman's account, ordered the hit on Evers, "as well as several bombings that resulted in the deaths of innocent people." A proficient shot as a boy, Beckwith bragged to Hockman that he "did not even need to use the scope to shoot Evers."<sup>xx</sup>

A member of DeLaughter's trial team, "Crisco," interviewed Hockman, who had convictions going back to 1945, at a federal penitentiary. Hockman confirmed to Crisco his statements in the FBI report "and then some." Hockman told the Jackson detective that Beckwith said "Smith" also gave him the orders to transport the explosives to those who actually exploded the device in the Birmingham, Alabama, church that killed four young girls, DeLaughter wrote in "Never Too Late," his personal account of his successful prosecution of Beckwith.

Asked about Evers, Hockman said Beckwith told him he "never did anything in those days without Mr. Smith's okay." Hockman also stated that Beckwith told him "the governor of the state at the time, whoever that was, assisted him greatly. He said he had a lot of local support, too; that two individuals, policemen I believe, provided him with a good alibi that he was in town some distance away, and he spoke of that as a joke."<sup>xxi</sup>

DeLaughter had to make a decision, whether or not to include Hockman's testimony. If Hockman was telling the truth, it would be good testimony for conviction. But Hockman had an insanity conviction in his long list of convictions, and this troubled the prosecution team. Further, Hockman tested "inconclusive" on a polygraph and became "an enigma I'd have to deal with later," DeLaughter wrote. Hockman never testified – and DeLaughter won without him.<sup>xxii</sup>

### *Tougaloo College Critical to the Movement*

To say that Tougaloo College students and some faculty members "played a role" in the Jackson Movement would be a clear understatement.

Why else would the State Sovereignty Commission in March of 1964 decide to hire John D. Sullivan, a former FBI agent who once worked for Guy Banister (a former CIA and military intelligence officer), to "discredit Tougaloo College"?

Or to force the firing of the school's pro-civil rights president?<sup>xxiii</sup>

THIS SMALL FOUR-YEAR private, coed, liberal arts school founded in 1869 by the American Missionary Association of New York became a critical center of activity in the 1950s and 1960s as students and some faculty led a multi-year effort to end racial discrimination in the state's capital city.

Set on 500 acres of a former plantation in the unincorporated area historically referred to as Tougaloo, Mississippi, the college is located approximately ten miles north of downtown Jackson, just across the county line in Madison County but now within the city limits of Jackson. The school was founded with a mission to train young people "irrespective of their religious tenets" and to educate with "the most liberal principles for the benefit of our citizens in general."

College courses were first offered in 1897, with the first Bachelor of Arts degree awarded in 1901. From its start, the college served all races and nearly seventy years later, a very small number of students at nearby Millsaps College, a white Methodist school, joined with Tougaloo students to form academic and social bonds that represented a rare example of racial cooperation in Mississippi.

Because Tougaloo was private and administered by a board in New York, it was free from state control and students could protest, at least in theory. In fact, many students were arrested for protesting and for trying to attend segregated white churches and concerts, with their President frequently bailing them out of jail. The students also led a successful campaign to encourage white entertainers not to participate in segregated performances in Jackson.

In the 1960s, SNCC members Bob Moses and James Lawson held voter registration and nonviolence workshops on the Tougaloo campus. Soon after, as volunteers practiced what they learned, violence was perpetuated against them. Faculty housing on the edge of campus sometimes became the target of drive-by shootings and the campus was the site of a cross burning.

But it was not always local Citizens Council members who fought Tougaloo professors and the administrators, who participated with their students in civil rights activities. One eastern "liberal" university undercut Tougaloo's president, who was a well-liked or much-hated administrator, depending on who was judge, a president who had been both active and supportive of his students in civil rights activities.

Several years after the installation of Dr. A. D. "Dan" Beittel as the school's president in 1960, Tougaloo began an exchange program with several Northern schools, including Brown University and with involvement of the Ford Foundation, bringing some white students to Tougaloo but also, unintentionally opening up the college to sophisticated spying.

As a result of cooperation among Brown's President and former CIA agent Barnabee C. Keeney, the FBI, and the Sovereignty Commission, Dr. Beittel was forced to leave the college in 1964 "at the insistence of Tougaloo's Board of Trustees."<sup>xxiv</sup> Researcher Will Tucker, searching to discover why Beittel was forced to retire, considered several possibilities – probably all intertwined:

On one hand, we have the Trustees' story, that they had been planning to fire Beittel since the fall, and attempted to start the process gently in January, but by moving slowly and trying to let him down easily, they opened themselves up to rumors and speculation about their motives. On the other hand, we have evidence that Beittel was despised by the racist Sovereignty Commission, which had ties to the FBI, and informants and operatives in Tougaloo College, and possibly

sympathizers elsewhere. We have Brown University, headed by a former CIA agent who left intelligence work to head a university and an organization that focused on raising money for the humanities from government and non-government sources. We have a University and Ford Foundation with at best a checkered past, with administrators who were church fellows and golf buddies with members of the Tougaloo Board. There could very easily be some truth in the rumors about foul play in Beittel's firing.<sup>xxv</sup>

The small black college was the frequent focus of the Sovereignty Commission's spying. Several faculty and administrators also spied on professors for the Sovereignty Commission and when the Commission's files were open, it was not difficult for many Jacksonians to determine who had been spying on whom.

For example, one report was filed November 13, 1962, by a Commission investigator, A. L. Hopkins, who met with a Citizens Council committee to furnish its members with secret files, many provided by the campus spies.

Attending the meeting were Louis Hollis, Bill Simmons and Dick Morpher, Citizens Council officials, along with Bill Clark, Alex Primos, Dr. Ney Williams, Fred Hoerner and Al Fred Daniels, committee members.<sup>xxvi</sup>

"The committee was interested in the faculty ... and any information in our files regarding their association or affiliation with the Communist Party, any Communist front organizations, or other subversive movements." Hopkins furnished the small group information files regarding John Salter, faculty member; A. D. Beittel, Tougaloo President; and Ernst Borinski, a social science professor.

An outstanding academic who escaped from Eastern Europe before the outbreak of World War II, Borinski came to Tougaloo in a special program designed to place European instructors in American black colleges. Borinski – a believer that extraordinary times required extraordinary action – helped black and white students from Tougaloo and nearby Millsaps College learn more about each other through meeting in small groups. The professor often worked in the background, advising Medgar Evers, while Ed King was out in the field, advising students.<sup>xxvii</sup>

A. L. Hopkins was "able to show this group [that] ... sit-inners at the library were Tougaloo students and that the Freedom Riders who began to arrive in Jackson shortly after the library sit-ins, contacted and visited Tougaloo." He also reported to the Council members "some contact" between John Salter, "who is strongly suspected of being a communist," and Professor James Silver, the "controversial history professor" at Ole Miss.

Committee members seemed "well pleased with the information furnished ... and plan to follow through on an investigation of Tougaloo and its faculty," Hopkins reported back to Johnston.

Salter, one of the three men under examination, was in fact actively involved in the Jackson Movement. In Rev. Ed King's Foreword to Salter's 1979 civil rights book, King, the campus chaplain, commented on the title once given to Salter by a Jackson newspaper, "Mustard Man." The phrase, sounding "cute," was "really obscene," King wrote.<sup>xxviii</sup>

He was referring to a caption placed over a photograph of Salter by the *Jackson Daily News* in September of 1963. A nearby headline clarified “Tougaloo Prof Joins Braden,” and a subheading made this clearer by stating “Pro-Red Outfit Enlists Salter.”

As chief organizer of the Jackson Movement and a close friend of the recently assassinated black leader, Medgar Evers, Salter had decided to leave Jackson to work for the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF) with Carl Braden, a white Kentuckian long active in civil rights and SCEF head – a man also frequently labeled as “communist” by the Sovereignty Commission investigators and other anti-civil rights leaders.

The Jackson press did not respect SCEF or John Salter or the movement, Ed King wrote, and the newspaper’s reference to “Mustard” had to do with a major sit-in – the most violent one in the country – at Jackson’s Woolworth’s store.

While the first sit-ins occurred in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960 and had spread to every state in the South except Mississippi, students at Tougaloo and Jackson College eventually held sit-ins – facing the worst repercussions. Unlike Mississippi, other Southern states by the spring of 1963 had already allowed some public facilities like lunch counters to be desegregated.

But Mississippi would not budge until a group of black and white students from Tougaloo, led by Pearlana Lewis, Memphis Norman, Anne Moody and Joan Trumpauer, were joined by other Tougaloo students including Walter Williams, and Jackson State students through CORE (led by George Raymond) to take their turn at Woolworth’s – “in an act to defy white Mississippi and inspire black Mississippi.” ... “They would sit together and break bread together, should they be served, at the segregated lunch counter,” wrote Dr. King.

The May 28, 1963 action was planned by the Jackson Movement Strategy Committee and its chairman, Dr. Salter, under the overall leadership of Medgar Evers. King was to observe but not participate that day.

King described what happened when the first group entered Woolworth’s on Capitol Street in downtown Jackson and walked over to the fifty-two-seat lunch counter. Police did not arrest the demonstrators but looked the other way as a mob of whites tormented and attacked the students for several hours of “sustained hatred and violence.”

What King saw, Salter later wrote, was “indicative of the soul of the Movement and the almost lack of soul and insensitivity bred by the racism and fascism of the whites of Mississippi.”

Black Tougaloo student Memphis Norman was knocked to the floor, stomped and beaten unconscious.<sup>xxix</sup> Other black and white women were “knocked from the stools and dragged by the hair as the TV crews and police watched.” During the two hours of violence, there were some arrests of peaceful demonstrators including King’s wife, Jeanette King.<sup>xxx</sup>

When Salter decided to join his students at the counter, he was “allowed” to pass through the mob and take a seat. But then “all fury broke loose” as angered segregationists seized the closest instruments at hand – plastic, ugly yellow jars of mustard and squirted this all over Salter and the students. Next was ketchup, then spray paint, then more lethal weapons of glass ash trays and sugar jar – and soon there was blood mixed in the mustard – and more blood.” The “demonstrator-victims” remained seated, according to Ed King,

“ ... never daring even to sing or pray aloud. The whole event [the most violent of all sit-ins in the United States] was carried on national TV news. Finally the order came from the Woolworth’s management to close the store. The mob left “and Dr. Dan Beittel, President of Tougaloo College, and I were able to remove the victims. The event shocked sensitive people in the nation but was shown to Mississippi TV audiences only in censored versions, and the local press mockingly wrote of Salter, one of the bloody, garbage-covered demonstrators, as “Mustard Man.”<sup>xxxix</sup>

Jackson journalists reported the sit-in “as a joke” and in the next three months, as similar activities continued, over one thousand local persons and some visiting supporters were illegally imprisoned.

By then, Medgar Evers had been assassinated and Jackson became infamous to the world. Salter was brutally beaten and jailed several more times, but survived several attempts on his life. The press also knew that white readers, who viewed Salter as the villain, “would not doubt that his departure from the state deserved major news coverage,” Ed King stated.

WLBT, Jackson’s NBC affiliate television station, was no better than the city’s newspaper. The station’s manager often “pulled the plug” when civil rights events were reported by the national press.<sup>xxxix</sup> The station’s reporters typically misreported civil rights clashes, playing down the violent beating of blacks by police officers as a scuffle, for instance. “We often had to read the *New York Times* to find out any news about civil rights,” recalled Millsaps sociology professor, Francis Coker.<sup>xxxix</sup>

After a long challenge by African Americans and the United Church of Christ, in 1971 the FCC turned the station’s license over to the bi-racial Communications Improvement, Inc.<sup>xxxix</sup>

This watershed event in Mississippi served as “... a great wake up call, and for some bit of time, this was wonderful,” Hodding Carter III wrote in an editorial.<sup>xxxix</sup>

But life itself was becoming personally more difficult for Carter. His mind was not functioning well, he was losing his eyesight, and he was having trouble writing. Alcoholism was a problem. He forgot appointments and missed an important board meeting at George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, his biographer Ann Waldron wrote.

Carter’s behavior in public was sometimes inappropriate. Nonetheless, in his last years, Hodding Carter, a moderate, remained a beacon to the few moderate and liberal journalists in Mississippi. John Herbers of the United Press Bureau, told Waldron how it was to be one of the “grateful guests” who came to Feliciana [the Carter home] to let off steam:

The whole state was so racist that I was totally surrounded by people who didn’t believe what I believed. They were backed up by tradition, religion, and the law. I’d get up every morning and ask myself, ‘Is there something wrong with me?’ I’d think I was crazy, and I’d see people like Hodding and know the real world was out there. A few journalists kind of banded together – we were totally outnumbered. If you tried to suggest that segregation was wrong, you got shouted down. Hodding gave me a reason to think what I was doing was worthwhile. He made me want to continue in journalism. If it hadn’t been for him I would have left. He gave us hope. <sup>xxxix</sup>

### *Voting rights edge closer*

As attainment of voting rights was coming closer for Mississippi's African Americans, COFO established seven voter registration training schools throughout Mississippi. It was a creative plan, using local staff members and a few dozen summer volunteer students. In a 1963 mock election, more than 88,000 disenfranchised African Americans selected Dr. Aaron Henry as Governor and the Reverend Ed King for lieutenant governor.

The Freedom Vote was designed for blacks to gain some experience voting, and some 35,000 more voters turned out than expected. On November 2, 3, and 4 the mock election voters were to drop their ballots into voting boxes (typically converted milk cartons) that were set up in black-owned grocery stores, churches, and elsewhere. If they were afraid of reprisal, the ballots could be mailed to designated headquarters.

Those actually voting in the "real" elections were asked to write in the names of the Freedom Vote candidates in protest, since write-in votes were automatically invalid in Mississippi.

Mock election results taught Rev. Ed King "that the best in Mississippi is as bad as the worst." King first became active in the Civil Rights Movement as a seminary student in the East. Arrested in Montgomery in 1960 for eating lunch in a racially mixed group, he was sentenced to a work farm. While confined, King was beaten by segregationist cell mates as guards watched. King was photographed in prison stripes and the picture was later sent to Mississippi newspapers along with an announcement he was engaged "to a girl from Mississippi."

Ordained in 1962, King was pressured by the Methodist conference in Mississippi not to return to his home state because of his civil rights stance. Yet Ed King believed his state had to change or there would be a holocaust. He wanted to make a difference through his church. So King persisted and achieved his goal.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

His reactions to the mock election and surrounding incidents demonstrated his keen observation of his surroundings and the anger that he felt:

During the last three weeks of the mock elections campaign, every single right a citizen has was violated. It was not enough that the police were not protecting us from would be killers, but they were actually joining in the harassment. Houses were invaded without warrants, and students who were working on the campaign were dragged from their beds. Polling places were threatened with bombing. Some towns such as Yazoo City refused to let us rally. In every town, the police followed our workers, waiting for the slightest infraction as an opportunity to arrest them. Some workers were arrested on suspicion of auto theft because they couldn't show registration papers for rented cars. In some cases, they were thrown in jail without any charge, apparently just to keep them from campaigning. Workers were beaten by both hostile whites and the police, and on more than one occasion Highway Patrolmen stopped campaign workers at the entrance of a town, pulled guns on them and said, "You'd better leave." There was everything short of murder and the only reason there wasn't that was poor aim."<sup>xxxviii</sup>

The mock election was expensive: with the local courts part of the system against voter registration, thousands of dollars were paid out in fines during the campaign and it was impossible to find lawyers to appear in all cases.

Adding to the reality of personal and financial harassment, official black registration increased by only 6 percent. Failure of blacks to register and vote in official elections was due to continued and increasing persecution by officials, the Citizens Councils, Ku Klux Klan, Sovereignty Commission and others, historian Woods observed.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Voter harassment, as King described, was apparent in many ways, having taken on new dimensions once the Sovereignty Commission came into existence. Countless requests came in to the Sovereignty Commission director for names of car tag owners of blacks attending certain meetings or voter training classes.

Others asked the Commission to conduct “deeper investigations” on specific persons attempting to register. In one request, the writer wanted further information on “outside agitators” who are “ruining” all of the “good Negroes” by “making them ask for things they don’t want.”

Not only did the Commission’s investigators collect voter data, another means of fact gathering involved the State Highway Patrol. On May 23, 1958, Sovereignty Commission investigator L. C. Hicks asked Inspector L. Y. Griffin of the Highway Patrol Sub-Station in Batesville for a favor:

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, the Southern Christian Brotherhood Conference, a Negro organization, is having a meeting in Clarksdale at the Haven Methodist church. This meeting is to be held to instruct and teach the Negroes how to qualify to vote. This is on a Thursday, I believe. If you could possibly do it, we would like to have the tag numbers of the cars that attend this meeting. P.S. I would suggest after 2 p.m. would be the best time to try to get these tag numbers as most of them will be in the church by this time.<sup>xl</sup>

Some police officers, sheriffs, deputies, and others were Klan members themselves, so it was too easy to acquire such identifying information and use it to harass and harm blacks who tried to vote or improve their lives in any way. Investigator Tom Scarbrough, in trying to learn more about certain Grenada blacks who were trying to register and vote, once wrote a memo to his boss about a “situation” in Grenada County:

The Sheriff [Speck Davis] stated ... that a Negro girl applied to the Circuit Clerk to register and passed the examination in good order. He said the girl told the Circuit Clerk her preacher insisted that all Negroes register to vote. The Sheriff did not get the Negro woman’s name, but said he would get her name and the name of the preacher and mail it to us for our files.<sup>xli</sup>

Investigator Scarbrough, always looking for information that he could pass along, once compiled a special report on SNCC’s Robert Moses that set up the SNCC voter registration advocate *bar none* as a “dangerous agitator” and “Communist”:

I have been informed by a person whom I consider to be reliable that the above home address of Moses is located two doors from the Communist Party newspaper – the *Daily Worker*, in New York.... Robert Moses first appeared in Greenwood, Mississippi, along or about the first of August 1962.... He is a Harvard graduate and ... a friend of Carl Braden, a known Communist. Braden was convicted for setting dynamite to his own house in Louisville, Kentucky, claiming that white racists did it.

Moses is the instructor for the trained agitators who are now agitating racial disorder throughout Mississippi.... Shooting into houses and various unfounded charges of brutality have followed Moses wherever he goes.... At one time, he moved into Sunflower County and instigated a drive to register negroes. A total of around 42 houses were fired into by someone in Sunflower County while Moses was busy trying to get Negroes to register to vote.... It is known that he has Robert Kennedy's telephone number as well as the telephone number of the Justice Department at his finger tips at all times.<sup>xlii</sup>

JOHN DANIEL WESLEY farmed on family land in Holmes County. He first became involved in the Civil Rights Movement through association with SNCC in Greenwood; soon he and about 13 other independent farmers formed a spin-off group in Holmes County. One Sunday they had a community meeting in the Milestone area with SNCC leaders and pledged to register the following Tuesday. Recalled Wesley: "We got there about eleven o'clock. Mr. Turnbow went in, into the circuit clerk's office, and they told him they was fixing to close for dinner. So we loaded up and went all the way to Greenwood to the SNCC office."<sup>xliii</sup>

But the group returned to Lexington in the mid afternoon where they were told to stand under a tree outside of the courthouse if they wanted to register. "The sheriff came out ... [and] said, 'Which one of y'all want to go in to try to register? That's what you came up here for, ain't it?'"<sup>xliiv</sup>

Wesley went inside first, where he was asked to draw a strip of paper from a fruit jar. "I pulled up *post facto* law. And [I asked] what [does] that mean?" Wesley was shown the door and no one in the group was allowed to register that day. Later that night, Hartman Turnbow's house was firebombed. Less than a year later, special tests were no longer allowed, and Wesley registered to vote. This time, he said, his insurance policy was cancelled.

Wesley and the others kept fighting, with help from SNCC. "The SNCC movement helped out a whole lot, you know. They gave people a lot of courage, and kept our morale built up, you know. So, the people just ... just got mad and said, 'We're going to do it!'"<sup>xlv</sup>

Still, there were others simply did not know what voting was all about or if they even should try to participate. Unita Blackwell, an Issaquena County cotton picker – who later became Mississippi's first black female mayor and a U. S. representative to China – recalled her introduction to voter registration drives:

About the only time the subject of voting ever came up in my life in the Mississippi Delta was when you heard that somebody's boss made it clear to his workers that he would not allow "his niggers" to vote. This was one of those "understood" rules in Mississippi: voting was for white people only. So ignorance and fear kept most us right where we'd always been. I didn't even really

know, in fact, how voting was supposed to help me, but the more I heard about white people being so against it, the more I started thinking there must be something to this voting.<sup>xlvi</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Massengill, 150-151. Massengill states that Anthony Villano, undercover FBI, infiltrated the Mafia and later recounted this story to Gerald Astor. Scarpa obtained a \$1,500 reimbursement from the bureau. “Scarpa reportedly signed a receipt for the payment, and that was that. The Bureau had the name of a suspect, and when the partial fingerprint on the murder weapon was compared, it checked out.”

<sup>ii</sup> Massengill, 153.

<sup>iii</sup> William H. McIlhany II, “Klandestine,” (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1975), 38.

<sup>iv</sup> Massengill, 153.

<sup>v</sup> Massengill, 87.

<sup>vi</sup> Massengill, 2.

<sup>vii</sup> Nossiter, 19. Cites “Silver, “Mississippi: The Closed Society,” 150.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid., 115. Cites *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, December 20, 1992.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>xiv</sup> Waldron, 301, cites *New York Times*, June 23, 1963.

<sup>xv</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>xvi</sup> Nossiter, Adam, “Of Long Memory” p. 238-240.

<sup>xvii</sup> One conspiracy theorist stated in 1994: “One of the main civil rights leaders of the early '60s, Medgar Evers (sp) the field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, was assassinated in 1963, a few months before Kennedy was assassinated. A white-supremacist named Byron de La Beckwith (sp) has been indicted for his assassination and is going to stand trial. He has been able to wiggle out of this so far. When Byron de La Beckwith was seeking to avoid indictment for the assassination of Medgar Evers, much of his political support came from retired U.S. Army Major General Edwin P. Walker.” Walker, who had successfully commanded the desegregation event at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, had been a divisional commander in Germany and was replaced by John Kennedy because Walker violated Army regulations by forcing his troops to study the “Blue Book” of the John Birch, a violation of U.S. military regulations - forcing your troops to study political doctrine. After leaving the army, Walker moved to the Dallas-Ft. Worth area where he became a protégé of H. L. Hunt. Obsessed with James Meredith, Walker was present during the riots at Ole Miss during September of 1962, after issuing a battle cry for civilian volunteers to move on Mississippi. “We have listened and we have been pushed around by the anti-Christ Supreme Court. It’s time to rise,” he announced during a radio talk show in Louisiana. Seven months later, on April 10, 1963, a sniper shot at Walker through his living-room window in Dallas. The sniper, missing Walker’s head by an inch, was later identified as Lee Harvey Oswald, who dubbed himself a “hunter of fascists.” Seven months later, Oswald was charged with assassinating President Kennedy and Walker was eventually tied to the Kennedy assassination. “In the fifth volume of the 26 volumes of Warren Commission testimony and exhibits, it is revealed, or it is documented that, Edwin Walker’s John Birch Society cell was used as a vehicle for bringing military intelligence agents over from Munich, Germany to operate at the field level in the assassination of John Kennedy.” (Source: a lecture by Dave Emory, reprinted in *Conspiracy Nation*, Vol.1 Num. 92, August 30, 1994, online.) In 1964, *Nation* magazine in “Notes on the Beckwith Trial,” (Volume: 198, Issue 0009, February 24, 1964) reported that during the Beckwith trial “...A uniformed honor guard was stationed at the door, and the nobles of Beckwith’s kingdom (former Governor Ross Barnett, ex-Major General Edwin Walker) came to pay him homage.”

<sup>xviii</sup> “Smith” is a false name.

<sup>xix</sup> Bobby DeLaughter, “Never Too Late,” (New York: Scribner, 2001), 179.

<sup>xx</sup> Ibid., 179-180.

<sup>xxi</sup> Ibid., 180-181.

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<sup>xxiii</sup> When Medgar Evers was killed, rumors quickly spread that more than one Klansman was involved, said L. C. Dorsey, Margaret Block and several other black Mississippians. Possible confirmation came from Becky Rouse of Sidon who in July of 2005 told Susan Klopfer that she worked as a waitress and restaurant manager in Greenburg at the “Cottonpatch” Restaurant in the mid 1990s where a small group of men frequently met for breakfast. “There were about eight of them and they talked freely around me, I guess because I was from Michigan and they wanted to get my reaction,” Rouse said. “Also, I’m a history buff and I could get them talking.” When the final Beckwith trial began, one of the older men, Gordon Lackey, “liked to brag” about his role in the murder, Rouse said. “Lackey said he killed Evers – that he was the triggerman – and not Beckwith. Lackey said that Beckwith knew he was dying and agreed to [turn himself in]...but Lackey said he flew a helicopter down to Jackson, shot Evers and came back early that morning. One of his friends, ‘Buddy’ would drink coffee with him and confirmed what Gordon Lackey was saying,” Rouse stated. Interestingly, Lackey sometimes flew as an agricultural pilot, said one Greenwood aviation history buff, Allan Hammons. While there were no commercial helicopters in the region at the time, according to Hammons, Lackey was a member of the National Reserves and the Guard. Further, the Klan owned its own airplane, and so Lackey would have had aviation access. Rouse said the old Klansmen also talked about the Emmett Till murder and believes, from comments made by Lackey, “he might have been involved in that murder, too.” Adam Nossitor in *Of Long Memory*, (137-139) described Lackey, a small-time motorcycle repairman and charter member of the White Knights as “Beckwith’s old friend.” Lackey had helped Sam Bowers draft a constitution for the new organization, according to Nossitor, and in August 1965, “he recruited Beckwith into the Klan.” It was Lackey who “proposed blowing up the SNCC headquarters in Greenwood, a plan that was later dropped because of FBI presence around the office,” Nossitor wrote.

<sup>xxiiii</sup> Sullivan “worked about a week on this project and was most helpful in strengthening our files,” Sovereignty Commission Director Erle Johnston wrote in a “memo to the file” dated March 16, 1964. SCR ID # 3-74A-0-8-1-1-1.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Will Tucker, “Who Fired Dan Beittel? Reconstructing the Prehistory of the Brown-Tougaloo Cooperative Exchange,” *The Brown Tougaloo Exchange*, online, (no date given). Cites: Memo, Erle Johnston, Director, Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, to W. A. Hotchkiss, Trustee, Tougaloo College, 17 April 1964; Memo, Director, Sovereignty Commission re: Tougaloo College, 13 April 1964, Director's File, Sovereignty Commission Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, SCR ID # 1-84-0-8-1-1-1.

<sup>xxv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Sovereignty Commission report filed by A. L. Hopkins, November 13, 1962. SCR ID # 1-3-0-11-1-1-1.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Mike Mohr, “A Southern Town,” filmed documentary.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Salter, Foreword by Rev. Edwin King, vii.

<sup>xxix</sup> Dittmer, 161.

<sup>xxx</sup> Salter, viii.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Hodding Carter III, interviewed for the documentary, “A Southern Town,” by Mike Mori.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Ibid., Professor Francis Coker.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Bert Case, “A Brief History of WLBT,” [wlbt.com](http://wlbt.com).

<sup>xxxv</sup> Hodding Carter III, *ibid.*

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Ibid., 251, from an interview with John Herbers in Washington, D. C., March 22, 1990.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> “Behind the Cotton Curtain,” 19.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Woods, 179.

<sup>xl</sup> Sovereignty Commission, letter from L.C. Hicks to L.Y. Griffin, May 23, 1958, SCR ID # 99-79-0-1-1-1-1

<sup>xli</sup> Sovereignty Commission, report by Tom Scarbrough, January 6, 1961. SCR ID # 2-21-20.

<sup>xlii</sup> Ibid., filed April 22, 1963, SCR ID # 1-71-03-1-1-1.

<sup>xliii</sup> Interview with John Daniel Wesley conducted by Harriet Tanzman on October 16, 1999, Civil Rights Documentation Project, Tougaloo Archives.

<sup>xliv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xlv</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>xlvi</sup> Unita Blackwell with JoAnne Prichard Morris, "Summer of '64: A Mississippi Freedom Fighter Remembers the Struggle," *The Jackson Free Press*, July 2004.