

## Chapter 33 More Violence to Reconcile

**B**y the end of the 1960s and into the early 1970s, violence was accelerating in the Magnolia state as more black people were murdered or “missing” than had been in recent years. Attempts to destroy any organizations trying to help blacks also increased.

In Greenville, thirteen-year-old Flora Jean Smith was sexually assaulted and murdered on July 19, 1969. Smith was reported missing after she failed to return from a babysitting job. A Sovereignty Commission report dated August 1 stated that “Sidney E. Taylor W/M, 36 years of age, of Greenville, a house painter” was charged with kidnapping and murder. Taylor pleaded innocent; some 900 persons participated in a march in Greenville in memory of the young girl.<sup>i</sup> Taylor did, however, serve a short prison sentence.

In the same year, there were reports of Black Panther organizations coming into the Delta. Clarksville city officials learned the Panther’s newspaper was scheduled to be shipped into their city. A Sovereignty Commission investigator reported to Erle Johnston in March of 1970 that two Clarksdale “sources” were asked to be on the lookout for the newspaper’s distributors:<sup>ii</sup>

“Black Panther newspapers reportedly are being sent by Air Express from California to Memphis, Tenn. It is not known at this time by what means these papers are being transported from Memphis to Cleveland. It is believed that Donald Sutton is [distributing the newspapers in] Cleveland” and selling them on Saturdays to fund rent of the Panthers headquarters in Cleveland,” the investigator stated.<sup>iii</sup>

Visiting Greenville the next day, the investigator learned that Sutton planned to bring a Greenville organization – “NDUGA” – into the Black Panther Party. Other Sovereignty Commission reports had already placed Black Panther organizations in Sunflower City and Indianola.<sup>iv</sup>

Even though the Panthers never had a large presence in the Delta, apparently they left their mark. When rumors of their return made it to Cleveland in 2002, “People in Cleveland were scared to death. One store owner boarded up his business and said he was going to a meeting in Florida; it was rumored he was the Grand Wizard of the Klan,” Margaret Block said.

“There were meetings at a private academy, as well, for the white people to try and plan how to counteract the Panthers coming to Cleveland.”<sup>v</sup> A march from Mound Bayou to Cleveland precipitated the rumors.

On April 12, 1970, Rainey Pool of Belzoni disappeared. His badly bloated body was found two days later in the Sunflower River. In his weekly report, Sovereignty Commission investigator James Mohead reported that Poole, approximately 45 years old, had been beaten to death sometime between that Saturday and Sunday in front of a restaurant known as the Fruit Stand in Louise:

“Shortly after this beating, the victim’s body was driven to a point on Highway 14, approximately 15 miles from Louise, and thrown or placed in the Sunflower River. The victim is not known to have ever participated in any civil rights activities.” Later Mohead was told that two white males, Doc Caston, 35 years old, and Harold Crimm, 21 years old, were arrested and charged with Poole’s murder:

“The sheriff advised there possibly will be more arrests made in the near future. He further advised that to the best of his knowledge, Poole, who was known by both black and white as a trouble maker when drinking, attempted to enter the Fruit Stand which is frequented only by whites.”<sup>vi</sup>

During a student protest on May 14 through May 15, 1970, at Jackson State College, Phillip Gibbs, 20, a junior, and James Earl Green, a Jackson bystander, were slain and several others wounded during a police barrage of gunfire on a dormitory and a dining hall.

Students at Jackson State College were protesting discrimination and the historical racial intimidation and harassment by white motorists traveling Lynch Street, a major thoroughfare that divided the campus and linked west Jackson to downtown. The students were also protesting against the Vietnam War and the May 4, 1970 tragedy at Kent State University in Ohio.

Jackson city police and Mississippi State troopers had ordered the demonstration, taking place in front of a women's dorm, to disperse. Reports indicated that when Jackson State students started to scatter and run into the dorm, the police opened up fire lasting 28 seconds. “They fired thirty-five shotguns, five military carbines and anything else they could get their hands on. Two students were killed and twelve wounded.”

Not only university but high school students were too often the victims of police action. On October 20, 1970, approximately 125 black high school students, most under the age of 18, were arrested in Charleston and taken to the prison at Parchman; two others were arrested and jailed in Sumner.

The students had been marching and picketing under the direction of Lucy Mae Boyd, the county's NAACP director, and Eugene Carter, a Congressional candidate, according to W. Webb Burke, Sovereignty Commission director, who filed a report October 21 phoned in by investigator James Mohead.<sup>vii</sup>

Students continued the activities they began four days earlier “by walking around the school, singing freedom songs and chanting. They were warned of possible arrest. They did the same thing on Monday morning and were again warned of arrest.”

”Those under 18 years of age were returned to Charleston after records were made of names, ages, etc. and they were never [taken] beyond the records office.” The students were returned to churches in Charleston where they were released to their parents, according to Mohead. In a 2005 interview, however, Boyd disagreed. “The children spent the night at Parchman in cells. The Sovereignty Commission was always twisting their facts around and this is just one example.”

Mohead reported he “took the offense” and contacted Aaron Henry about what happened “since he heard a rumor that Henry had been in Charleston.” As it turned out, Henry had been in telephone conversation with Boyd throughout the day.

Mohead also reported that Henry told him the idea was picked up from “the ‘Coffeeville action’ for the express purpose of getting back into Federal Court in order to bring about a change from the busing from one school to another as is the practice there at present.”

Students were bussed to one school for part of a day, then to another school under court order, and they want to get back in court in an effort to bring a change in the procedure.

According to Robert Kegl, a retired teacher, the children were sent home after driving the Parchman staff “crazy.” “They were so loud when they got to Parchman, the police officers were told to get them out of there. Parchman wanted them gone,” he laughed.

### *Patrolmen Shoots at Black Family, Beats Up Father*

Willis Wilson, Jr., 40, told Memphis attorney Robert K. Morris that a highway patrolman standing by the left side of the road shot into his car. Wilson was driving south of Memphis between Walls and Lake Cormorant at about 3 p.m. on November 21, 1970.<sup>viii</sup>

Fragments of steel off the door handle struck several of his children in the eyes, but no one was hit by the bullet. Wilson told Morris that he was hit about seven times on the head with a blackjack and then beaten around the head with the patrolman's fist.

"He was then taken to the Justice of the Peace of Lake Cormorant where he was hit on the knee with a blackjack. He was later seen by Doctor W. A. Bisson and Doctor James G. McClure, both of whom verified that the man had apparently suffered a beating as evidenced by tenderness and bruises. The diagnosis was contusion of the scalp, face and left lower thigh," Morris wrote to Maxine Smith, Memphis NAACP executive secretary on January 12, 1971.

Wilson was released on a \$250 bond and "we went to the J.P. Court shortly thereafter and asked for a continuance. We were informed at that time that the man was charged with three misdemeanor charges – reckless driving, improper driver's license, and failure to stop for lawful arrest."

"When the matter still had not been set for trial, we called the J.P. Court this week and were informed that Mississippi Highway Patrolman, Larry Weaver, badge E34, had sworn out a warrant charging Mr. Wilson with a felony charge of assault with an automobile."

While Wilson's case was pending, it was also under investigation by the FBI. Morris told Smith he was concerned that Wilson would not receive a fair trial in the Lake Cormorant J.P. Court or be able to make bond in Mississippi.

"We have been told that there is a system of shaking down motorists, particularly colored people, in that area. Our concern has been further heightened by Mr. Wilson's statements that he patrolman made various threats that he was going to kill him a 'nigger.'"

Asking for the NAACP's assistance, Morris said that Wilson had been employed at the V.A. Hospital for three years, was a family man with five children – all of whom were in the car at the time of the incident. "We questioned the older children and they also stated that a white policeman shot at their daddy and whipped him."<sup>ix</sup>

Smith, in requesting Aaron Henry's involvement,<sup>x</sup> said she was concerned Wilson might be bound over to the state. "[Morris feels] that the additional charge was filed by the Highway Patrolman in retaliation for the incident being reported to the FBI."

### *Jo Etha Collier Killed*

Drew High School student, Jo Etha Collier, was murdered on the evening of her graduation in 1971. At approximately 9:45 p.m. on May 25, shortly after the ceremony ended, Collier was talking to friends in front of a small grocery store. As a pickup truck passed by, Collier was hit in the head and killed by gunshots coming from the truck.

Collier was shot by Wesley Parks, 25, of Drew in a murder that “seemed to have no motive,” said a sheriff’s deputy. Parks, his brother and their nephew, Allen Wilkerson, 19, of Memphis were in the truck and all three were arrested in nearby Cleveland within three hours of the shooting. A 22-caliber pistol “with one bullet missing” was found in the car along with a 12-gauge Army issue riot gun and a 22-caliber automatic rifle, according to Sovereignty Commission reports.<sup>xi</sup>

Others disagreed with the sheriff’s assessment, including Fannie Lou Hamer, who said she was “convinced that Collier’s death was connected with the current voter registration campaign.”

Collier was not active with the voter registration campaign going on at the time, but visiting reporters were reminded that black political activity in the Delta – where blacks outnumber whites – had “long met with a proportionate increase in random, almost casual, white harassment.”<sup>xii</sup> FBI records on the death of Collier, requested by this book’s author in April 2004, were reported by the FBI as “destroyed on March 16, 2004. No reason was given.

Police Chief J. D. Fleming of Drew said the three men “were very much under the influence of alcohol.” Fleming took Collier’s two companions to Cleveland to identify the suspect. The three men offered no resistance when arrested in Cleveland, Fleming said.

It was Collier’s first year at Drew High School. The well-liked student had earlier received the school’s spirit award on awards day and was named the “Most Valuable Player in Track.” The young woman was also awarded a basketball jacket.

About 45 minutes before the shooting, the men were seen sitting in their truck at a service station located less than a block away from the grocery store. When a black male asked for a light, “one of the occupants of the vehicle pointed a revolver at the negro male and told him ‘I’ll put all your G.D. lights out,’” the investigator stated.

Collier was killed by a single bullet, which hit her in the neck as she stood in front of a grocery store “in the negro section of town.” At her funeral, Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, chair of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, eulogized Collier before an audience of 2,000.

“The foes of evil have robbed us of one of our most dear and talented sisters.... How long will black people be mistreated in Mississippi? How long will black people be shot down in the Delta?” the SCLC leader asked the crowd gathered in the auditorium of Drew High School.

Abernathy called for massive change that would come with black voter registrations to put blacks in office “... so that we can see that her living and dying was not in vain.”<sup>xiii</sup>

Drew Mayor W. O. Williford, seated on the stage during the rites, reportedly expressed surprise to a reporter at the large turnout of blacks and spoke of recent gains by Delta blacks:

“If that many Negroes had gathered in one place when I first took office there surely would have been bloodshed.” The atmosphere was peaceful enough that Williford quickly sent away the highway patrolmen who were there in case of an anticipated flare up. Days earlier, the mayor imposed an 8 p.m. until daylight curfew and called in the officers to help enforce it.

After the ceremony, the 18-year-old student, who was regarded highly by teachers and friends, was buried in the all-black section of the Drew cemetery.<sup>xiv</sup>

Cleve McDowell, a black Jackson attorney and Drew native, returned to keep his hometown calm. Meeting with the mayor, McDowell was required to pledge that no outsiders – “especially Fannie Lou Hamer” – would come into Drew and cause problems. Collier’s family was extremely poor, and McDowell took care of the funeral arrangements.

The civil rights attorney requested and was granted a permit to hold peaceful daily marches in the downtown section of Drew. McDowell also praised the “swift police work” in apprehending the three men. “Now there must be vigorous prosecution. Responsible people are angry at this senseless murder.”

McDowell soon moved back to his hometown, eventually serving as the town’s assistant mayor and as a member of the school board, a fact not lost on the Sovereignty Commission.

An investigator’s report filed September 16, 1971, noted “Chief of Police Fleming . . . advised that Cleve McDowell, N/M, formerly of Drew, now of Jackson, is spending a lot of time in the Drew, Ruleville area. These visits are believed to be political, in nature.”

By the next year, McDowell was named to the state Penitentiary Board in July by Governor Bill Waller and was reappointed for a five-year-term in 1972. He was the first black to hold this position, until then reserved for whites.

At the end of his term, McDowell told Ron Harris of the Associated Press he hoped his appointment helped to pave the way for other African Americans, that he had “pushed hard” to get the appointment because he felt blacks needed to become involved at the decision making level.

PROMPTED BY THE murders of Collier and others, Aaron Henry telegraphed President Nixon to protest the “wave of senseless killing in Mississippi of black citizens by white citizens.” Henry said it was the “third such killing in less than a week.” “There was no provocation and no words were passed. It’s doubtful that they knew Miss Collier,” Henry told a UPI reporter. “They apparently were out to kill a black, any black.”<sup>xv</sup>

All three men were initially charged with murder<sup>xvi</sup>; but only Wesley Parks was tried. Charges were dropped against the other two men. Parks was sent to prison for five years, but served less than three years of his sentence. This inaction prompted Henry to question George Everett, D.A. for the three-county region. There were potential dangers from Everett’s decision to drop charges, Henry warned in a letter to the prosecutor:

Your statement today . . . really pulls the rug from under those of us in the NAACP who worked so hard to prevent violent retaliation against whites by determined members of the black community. Particularly you have seriously undercut the good will efforts of Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer and attorney Cleve McDowell.

There are not as many of us in the Black Community as there once were who took a forthright position condemning violence, for whatever the cause. Now there are many Blacks anxious to engage in the “eye for an eye,” “tooth for a tooth,” type of violence. Putting it another way, “white man for black man” retaliation. When announcements come out such as you issued today, [they] only give reason for those prone toward violence to exercise it. Those who once had the

confidence of the community, on the sides of non-violence, are losing the confidence of the Black citizens of our communities, especially when we were the ones to caution and advise the masses to have confidence in the law or the legal system.

You see, if a jury acquits a man who is tried, and in this case a white man for the murder of a Black citizen, then at least there has been some attempt to secure justice. But when the District Attorney pronounces that those charged will not be brought to trial, then we are almost back to where we were in the “Dred Scott,” U. S. Supreme Court decision of a hundred years ago, that established that a Black had no rights that whites were bound to respect. Of course this also meant the privilege of a white to take the life of a black with no fear of ever coming to trial, just as your announcement today. Once the pent up violence that exists in many members of the Black Community begins to explode, then the cry of the white community is going to be a call for “peace.” ... You can help us in our position, or render us useless, and those prone toward violence will be in the position of advising our people what steps to take next.... Think it over!<sup>xvii</sup>

One older Drew resident, asking to remain anonymous, said in a 2004 interview that random shootings frequently took place in the community for years, and sometimes still do. “This was happening everywhere in the Delta, and no one would do anything about it. Whites rode around on our side of town and shot at black people. There was no reason for it, except they were usually drinking.”<sup>xviii</sup>

Another version of this story that still goes around Drew is that some students believed there was another person riding in the car – a teacher. This person was apparently harassed enough by students that he finally left to teach in a private, segregated academy.

In neighboring Tallahatchie County, a murder took place two days before Collier was killed. On May 23, 1971, veteran Eddie McClinton was allegedly killed by a white “night marshal” in Sumner in a fight at a pop machine.<sup>xix</sup> Sovereignty Commission investigator Mohead learned from county deputy sheriff Downs, doubling as the town marshal, that Aaron Henry sent a telegram to President Richard Nixon over the incident, asserting that McClinton was shot three times and killed by a white outside of Sumner.

McClinton was observed by Sumner Night Marshal Tom Trannam “kicking and beating on a change machine” at a self-service gas station. When Trannam intervened, McClinton threatened to kill him, Downs told Mohead.

“McClinton started for Trannam, in a threatening manner, Trannam fired one shot to the right of McClinton attempting to stop him. McClinton continued to advance and told Trannam, ‘If you don’t kill me, you white S.O.B., I’m going to kill you.’ At this time, Trannam shot McClinton once in the arm and once in the chest with a 45 cal. pistol,” Mohead’s report stated.

No hearing or coroner’s inquest was held, and Downs said he would get back to Mohead after he conferred with Trannam “and the two negro witnesses.”

During the week of November 1-6, 1971, Sovereignty Commission investigator Fulton Tutor reported from Pontotoc where the grand jury reported out, “without returning an indictment against Jake Denton, W/M, who shot ‘the Negro’ [Edger Higginbottom] a few months ago in Ecu. There is a possibility of some reaction from the black community over this.”<sup>xx</sup>

Tutor did not name the victim in his report. Also during the week, Tutor “did some checking on white voters to see if all were out to vote.” In Holly Springs, Tutor learned from Mayor Coopwood that “for the first time the whites all worked together in this election and this really paid off, as the blacks only won the Justice of the Peace post.”

As state NAACP president, Henry often received letters like one dated December 21, 1972 from a resident of Jonesboro, Arkansas regarding her missing brother, Sid Harrison of Holcomb in Carroll County.<sup>xxi</sup>

In late October 1972, Harrison disappeared from his family with no trace of him or his automobile. “Since several of Mr. Harrison’s relatives believe that he has been murdered in the manner of the three civil rights workers of 1964 near Philadelphia ... along with [his] relatives appreciate ... your immediate cooperation.” Like so many other Mississippi stories, this disappearance appears to have faded away into history. No other related letters or reports could be found in Henry’s papers or elsewhere.

On April 5, 1972, Mississippi lost one of its most famous journalists to natural death. After a series of health problems, Hodding Carter Jr. died at 65 of a heart attack during a workout at an athletic club in Greenville. “He knew his enemies’ virtues and would recite them, and his favorite retort to the righteously angry was, ‘Yes, but ...’ He told great stories, full of villains and heroes and morals, stories for passing on. We will remember,” wrote his son, Philip, in an editorial for his father’s newspaper.<sup>xxii</sup> Hodding Carter III was already serving as the newspaper’s publisher. The family sold the publication soon after his father’s death.

In May of 1973, Mrs. Daisy Savage and her 11-year-old grandson of Hollandale, African Americans, were murdered by Klansmen. Charles Sudduth, a Deltan who researches and writes about the Mississippi Klan, believes that Daisy Savage had provided room for the two white civil rights workers assigned to the small town near Belzoni in 1964.

“What I heard was that [a city official] and a party of 4 to 20 men stoned them to death.<sup>xxiii</sup> I also heard that at least 1 black person witnessed her killing and that person is said to still be alive. That was also confirmed to me by a black civil rights attorney who was originally from Hollandale, Jesse Pennington.”

The killing may have taken place in south Washington County, at or near the Yazoo Wildlife Preservation, Sudduth said. “If it in fact this [is true], then Federal authorities have jurisdiction in the matter, and this would be a horse of a different color.

“On the other hand, I also heard [the murders] took place right at the county line between Issaquena and Washington County, so this might indicate a still unresolved question of jurisdiction. If it happened in Issaquena, then the Washington County D.A. could deny all knowledge of the matter.”

Sudduth said he was given the name of a Klansman who “knows each and every single detail of the event.... I was told that he had a hand in the event.”

Message on a Clarksdale Internet discussion group – *searching*<sup>xxiv</sup>

I lived in Clarksdale from 1971 to 1989 and am searching to find archived obituaries or newspaper articles on deceased family members. My mother, Dorothy Sykes was murdered on May 5, 1977 and her body was found in a ditch just outside of the Clarksdale area. She had seven bullet wounds to the head. I do recall that there was a typo in the spelling of my mother's last name in the obituary. Her address was 324 Bolivar Street.

Also, my aunt, Lillie Mae Bumpers, was killed and her body was found in Moon Lake around June to September 1982. Rescue workers were searching for the body of a couple that were suspected to have drowned in a fishing boat and they discovered her body during the search. The funeral home that handled my mother's body was Delta Burial Funeral Home and I think that Smith Funeral Home handled my aunt's body.

I now living in \*\*\*\*\* but would be more than happy to come and pick up any material that you may be able to provide for me. If there is a cost for obtaining this information, please let me know as well. Thank you for your time. “Xxx”

Aaron Henry met with Governor Cliff Finch and his Director of Minority Affairs, R. L. Bolden on September 16, 1976, to “acquaint and remind them of the upsurge in racism that is pervading Mississippi, with its most pronounced manifestation being in the area of police brutality.”

According to Henry, the two most recent worst acts of this were the apparent lynching of sixteen-year-old James Calhoun in the Bolivar-Sunflower area and the killing of a young black by a highway patrolman in Sturgis, Mississippi.

The Sovereignty Commission was not above harassing Henry and there would be payback for these and other complaints. <sup>xxv</sup>

Aaron Henry spent the following day in Oxford and then attended a meeting on the Gulf Coast with Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter. Saturday was filled with Democratic Party Administrative Committee meetings in Jackson and with leaders of the Mississippi Carter-Mondale campaign, Head Start meetings, and dinner with friends, running until 10 p.m. that evening.

Henry returned to his hotel room but was awakened shortly after midnight with a call “informing me that a black youth was being beaten by the police in the park across from Central High School” a few blocks from the hotel. Deciding to observe the action, he dressed and walked around to the park where he saw two young men sitting on a park bench at the park’s entry.

The NAACP director asked if they had seen a black youth being beaten by the police and both replied that had not. Henry took their names – David Bronstein and Isom Herron – and then saw a man approaching him with handcuffs in one hand and a portable radio in the other.

He asked the officer about the beating of a young black man and was told that he was “sticking my nose too much in police business.” Upon the officer’s suggestion, they both headed back to the hotel “to talk” but

the officer became suddenly angry and asserted Henry was interfering with the legal activity of a police officer.

Aaron Henry was placed under arrest, while reminding the officer that he had "... been in jails before, larger than the ones in Jackson." Henry was taken to the station and charged with disorderly conduct with a bond set at \$500. A court appearance was set for the following Monday; this was a resurgence of racism, Henry said:

We are in the process now of formulating plans to challenge this resurgence of racism. Some personalities in Mississippi still feel that the repressive tactics of the 1960s will still work. Although the Sovereignty Commission no longer legally exists, its tactics are forever before us. The judgments against the NAACP by two recent Mississippi judges, the attacks upon black and white personalities in this rebirth of vicious Dirty Tricks will live for a while, but in a short time they too will pass away. Although there are some Mississippians unhappy about the progress of the Black and White Community away from racism, the reality of the uniting of the Democratic Party with blacks and whites equally involved, is more progress than some, perhaps many, would like to see. Nevertheless, it is for real.<sup>xxvi</sup>

ON MARCH 14, 1977, FANNIE Lou Hamer died penniless in Mound Bayou. Owen Brooks and Charles McLaurin made the arrangements for her funeral and raised the funds to pay for it. Her last years were spent at home in Ruleville, where she raised thousands of dollars to feed displaced farm laborers through her Freedom Farm Cooperative and pig bank.

Mrs. Hamer also raised funds for housing and for the day care center that was named for her. She had continued as an activist, speaking against the Vietnam War<sup>xxvii</sup> and abuses in the state's poverty and Medicaid programs. In her final years, Hamer was in pain as she suffered from breast cancer, heart disease, and diabetes; she had never totally recovered from her beatings, particularly the beating she received in Winona, several friends said, including Margaret Block: "Everyone said she died of diabetes and cancer, but she died from those beatings."

Hamer's death was reported by major news organizations, and hundreds of Civil Rights Movement and national political figures came to her funeral to join her Mississippi friends in paying tribute.

Julian Bond, Stokely Carmichael, Aaron Henry, and Hodding Carter III spoke of her contributions. Andrew Young, the principal speaker, praised Mrs. Hamer as "a woman who literally helped turn this nation around." She was well known in life and to the present for her soulful song leading, especially "This Little Light of Mine."

*Sovereignty Commission closed – 21 years later "some" records made public*

In April 1973, Governor William Waller vetoed all funding for the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission. Two months later, at the last official Sovereignty Commission meeting on June 22, 1973, the 12-member board voted to seal and transfer the agency's files to the secretary of state for safekeeping.

The Commission officially closed its doors June 30, 1973 then totally dissolved the Sovereignty Commission in January 1977. Mississippi legislators introduced bills to abolish the commission and authorized its records be sealed until July 1, 2027. The House voted 110-7 in support and Gov. Cliff Finch signed the bill into law March 4, 1977

The Office of the Secretary of State transferred the Sovereignty Commission records – in locked cabinets and sealed with metal bands – to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History where they were placed in a vault.

At the time, the American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi, Delta Ministry, Owen Brooks, and Ken Lawrence sued state officials in federal court to open Sovereignty Commission files.

In 1979, U. S. District Judge Harold Cox dismissed the ACLU lawsuit but on April 8, 1981, the 5th U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals reinstated it.

U. S. District Judge William H. Barbour Jr. enjoined the state on October 22, 1986, from investigating or harassing people who exercise First Amendment rights after Rev. Ed King and John Salter (formerly Hunter Gray or Hunter Bear) asked for privacy protections for victims of Sovereignty Commission spying. Both men were criticized for delaying opening of the records; some suggested King and Salter may have served as informants, themselves.

King elaborated on this decision when interviewed by Peter Maass of *The New Republic* magazine: "You have to understand race relations, if not from a viewpoint of Welty or Faulkner in fiction, then from sociology.<sup>xxviii</sup>

"We had an evil system, but it was a functioning society so that people had to have lots of very complex roles and blacks and whites had to have a great deal of communication. Thank God we overthrew that system, but somebody who doesn't understand it, looking back on it, might misinterpret it," said the former Tougaloo College chaplain, who by then was a professor at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

King gave as example principals of black schools who, as the files revealed, frequently met with commission investigators, as Maass went on to question:

Were they self-interested informers, or did they have to deal with the white power structure in order to get books for their segregated schools? And what about [Charles] Evers? While it's clear he was no angel--in his autobiography, he admitted to running numbers and being involved in prostitution in his younger years – Evers says he didn't know the white men he met with were from the commission. He says they introduced themselves as being "from the government." The lacerating criticism he now faces is reminiscent of the ease with which Eastern Europeans were scarred, belatedly, by contact they had with intelligence agencies. Genuine acts of treachery were abundant. But some cases were murkier. For example, onetime Czech dissident Jan Kavan unwittingly met a secret police operative in the 1970s, and the operative opened a file on him. Once police archives were opened, Kavan faced accusations of being a collaborator. He had to go to court to clear his name; he is now the foreign minister of the Czech Republic.<sup>xxix</sup>

Maass suggested it was “because of problems of this sort” that King opposed releasing the files without privacy guarantees. Judge Barbour ordered the Sovereignty Commission files be opened on July 27, 1989, but delayed the opening for an appeal by the privacy plaintiffs.

Once the records were finally made public in March of 1998 – those records that had not been destroyed by public officials – *The Clarion-Ledger* reported the Sovereignty Commission screened potential jurors in 1964 for the trials of Byron De La Beckwith in the slaying of NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers. Prosecutors investigated the Commission's action and held a third trial of Beckwith that finally led to his conviction.<sup>xxx</sup>

Rumors of “someone” seeing a truckload of Sovereignty Commission files being hauled away still persist; while it may never be possible to learn what records were not turned over, it is possible to conjecture what files would be missing. Dr. John Salter (Hunter Bear) gave his opinion that “any Sovereignty Commission papers withdrawn by the Commission or by its friends and thus ultimately never released to the public would include those involving substantial lawbreaking on the part of the state. There would be many possibilities in that context. Another possible, and closely related category, would be [information] which could be federally subpoenaed for certain types of lawsuits, e.g., voting rights.”<sup>xxxi</sup>

Even with many reports and files obviously missing, it still did not take civil rights activists very long to learn the names of some of the Commission’s spies: Jesse Morris of Holmes County discovered it was his best friend. Most reports filed on Morris were from “Agent X,” who was secretly paid as much as \$500 per month by the Sovereignty Commission—“big money in Mississippi in those days,” Maass wrote.

Many documents were leaked to the press even before the formal release of the files in March. Hence, Morris was left with no doubt that rumors were true – “Agent X was his best friend, a fellow black Mississippian named R.L. Bolden.” Morris, Maass wrote, was “hardly the only person in Mississippi to have found a disquieting revelation in the commission’s files:

The release of the documents has held up a mirror to Mississippi, and the mirror shows an ugly reflection from more than 30 years ago. It is the ugliness of informers, of friends ratting on friends, the ugliness of blackmail and a secret spy agency that did as it pleased. Although it is no secret that the Mississippi of three or four decades ago could be a dangerous place for anyone who deviated from the segregationist norm, the opening of the files illustrates the quasi-totalitarian nature of the state government. Thus, it highlights an often- overlooked fact: the struggle for integration in Mississippi was not just a struggle against racism or a struggle for the rights of one oppressed race. It was a struggle for democracy.

Consider this description of a dictatorial state: “A never-ceasing propagation of the 'true faith' must go on relentlessly, with a constantly reiterated demand for loyalty to the united front, requiring that non-conformists and dissenters from the code be silenced, or, in a crisis, driven from the community. Violence and the threat of violence have confirmed and enforced the image of unanimity.” This is not an essay by George Orwell or Vaclav Havel but a passage from *Mississippi: The Closed Society*, by University of Mississippi history professor James W. Silver. Published in 1963, the book was widely read, particularly at the Sovereignty Commission, which

had Silver under surveillance. Indeed, Silver was one of many whites-- not all of whom were necessarily liberals--who were spied upon along with blacks. It's no accident that Mississippi's leaders called their spy agency the "State Sovereignty Commission" rather than the "State Segregation Commission." For them, political repression and state sovereignty were inseparable.<sup>xxxii</sup>

FROM THE END of the 1970s through the mid-1980s was a time of "crisis and renewal" for Mississippi Delta blacks. Three examples of community responses to what historian Woods calls "the collapse of the Second Reconstruction" help in understanding a renewal of activism for the African American Community.

The first story begins with Eddie Carthan, who in 1977 was elected as the first African American Mayor of Tchula, a town of 3,000 located in Holmes County. Whites had continued dominating local and county governments throughout the Delta, and by custom refused to apply for any federal programs that would benefit blacks. Any funds they actually applied for were typically used to improve only the white communities.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Unlike his white predecessors, Carthan immediately began working to bring in federal housing, health, and community development programs for Tchula residents and as a result, he was physically attacked. Then when Carthan refused to take a reported \$10,000 bribe from planters, his salary was cut by 90 percent. Locks on City Hall were changed and town aldermen appointed their own sheriff. Carthan, five deputies, and another alderman tried to retake City Hall and were arrested and sentenced to three years in prison – the judge was also the sister-in-law of the newly appointed sheriff.

\* \* \*

#### *Meeting by chance?*

Samuel Block, a SNCC field secretary who fought for voting rights in the Delta, had moved to California at the end of the Greenwood movement where he continued civil rights activities. By coincidence, Block was sentenced to federal prison at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama, and Eddie Carthan was sent there, too.

"Sam had been set up for an embezzlement charge and for "running guns to the Contras," said his sister, Margaret Block. "My brother was very bright, but not stupid. And he would never have committed such crimes.

"About the worst thing he ever did was when Eddie Carthan's family came to prison to visit and got the wrong day – it wasn't visitor's day – and they were told they could not see Eddie. So Sam helped Eddie sneak out of the prison to see them and then back in."

Block was in prison for five years until "he finally got out on parole and appeals." His alleged crime took place in California, but the trial ended up in federal court in Oxford, Mississippi, Margaret Block said. "I've never figured out why this happened. But I'll never forget at sentencing when the judge told him, 'We finally got your smart ass now. I've waited a long time.'<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Samuel Block, born in 1939, died on April 13, 2000 in his Los Angeles apartment at the age of 60. “There was never an inquest; no coroner pronounced him dead, and I still have questions,” Margaret Block said. “He had not been ill.

“I do know that someone removed the hard drive to his computer and took his papers; that apparently happened during his funeral.”

Margaret Block said that she learned from Block’s daughter that the coroner was never called to pronounce her brother dead and that his death certificate was not signed as a result until two weeks later, after an autopsy was performed.

“The police and medics had called the funeral home and took him there directly. This held up the funeral service for two weeks because the coroner finally was able to do an autopsy. The results were termed inconclusive because his body had been embalmed.”

Sam Block was scheduled to keynote a civil rights conference celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SNCC at Shaw University in North Carolina. “He did not show up and people began to worry. I don’t know exactly what happened next but that his daughter was called. She went to his apartment and found him dead. I do not that his death is being reinvestigated by friends.”

In the 1960s, working for SNCC, Block had served as point man for the registration effort in Greenwood a key battleground, and headquarters of the white Citizens Councils. In his first six months there, the violent response of citizen council members and others made the job nearly impossible: *Look* magazine reported in 1963 that Block had signed up only five black voters.

“That same year, after one of Block’s many arrests, a judge offered to suspend his sentence if he would agree to stop working for SNCC, give up the voter registration project and leave town. ‘Judge,’ Block replied. ‘I ain’t gonna do none of that.’”<sup>xxxv</sup>

James Travis of Greenwood, who was shot in the head and neck as he drove a car with several SNCC colleagues in 1963 – and survived – called his old friend Block “very smart” and “fearless.” He went through a lot... He was beaten and jailed on many occasions. He was dedicated.”<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Margaret Block told Douglas Martin of the *New York Times* that her brother’s “feisty nature” was apparent in the ninth grade, when he refused to take an IQ test at the segregated school he attended. “He said it didn’t have anything to do with our culture and the way we lived.”

After studying political science for two years at Marlboro College in Vermont, Block had transferred to Mississippi Valley State College, a small black school, where he was kicked out for his civil rights activities, Margaret Block said. “I would like to see this school now give Sam some recognition for his place in the civil rights movement.”

Block was described by Taylor Branch in his 1988 *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years* as a pivotal figure in Greenwood while the town’s importance in the civil rights struggle grew. “Block had acquired a local reputation as a stubborn, lonely figure among the strange new breed of devout daredevils.”<sup>xxxvii</sup>

\* \* \*

AN ALDERMAN LOYAL to the plantation bloc was killed several years later during a robbery, and this time Eddie Carthan and his brother were charged with the murder. When the prosecutor called for his

execution, activists launched a campaign for his release. The jury found Carthan and his brother innocent, after one hour of deliberation, but Carthan and his supporters continued to face problems.

After Carthan was freed, the Mississippi office of the U. S. Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) attempted foreclosure on his 500-acre farm. The state administrator leading the attack was the former Holmes County office supervisor who had been “appointed to his new position by the state director of the FmHA, Don Barrett, “a member of a major planter family in Holmes County that also held several prominent positions in county law enforcement.”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

The Carthan incident raised new fears ... “that the use of political office, fabricated charges, biased prosecution, and judicial collusion in the Delta would become the pillars of a new era of attacks launched against African American leaders nationwide.”<sup>xxxix</sup>

THE SMALL TOWN of Tunica, one of the most heavily African American counties in the nation, was also a center of regional conflict during the First Reconstruction. But in the fall of 1984, the plight of black families living in Tunica raised national attention when the city’s abhorrent conditions for black families were reported.

With a population of 7,050 African Americans and 2,594 whites, the city’s black community of Kestevan Alley drew attention because there were no water or sewer connections. The community became known as “Sugar Ditch,” and was considered the epicenter of parasitic and bacteriological infections, malnutrition, and hunger.

Running behind a group of dilapidated houses, the ditch had been part of the city since 1927. “It had no water or sewer connections even though the three white subdivisions annexed after it did. Yet, black residents still had to pay city water fees. The roach- and rat-infested shacks of sugar ditch were rented to tenants for between \$35 and \$65 a month. If the rent was paid on time the merchants owning the properties would provide loans to purchase food and clothing at exorbitant rates of interest.”<sup>xl</sup>

Tunica County had the lowest Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits in the nation. Officially, the unemployment rate was 26 percent and black high school graduates numbered 14.5 percent.

“Managing and reproducing this devastation were several plantation bloc millionaires who thoroughly dominated the economic and political life of the community. With an average farm size of 1,514 acres, 81 percent of the land in Tunica County was dedicated to agriculture and livestock production.”

Many organizations came together to help “fix” Tunica after the predominantly African American organization, the National Association of Health Services Executives (NAHSE), filed charges against the city with the federal Office of Revenue Sharing for delivering water and sewer services based on race. The charges were upheld and in March of 1985, a letter of noncompliance was sent to Governor Bill Allain.

Others became involved, including Reverent Jesse Jackson, Mississippi senator Henry Kirksey, and congresspersons Charlie Hayes of Chicago and Augustus Hawkins of Los Angeles.

Facing pressure, the city ordered property owners to connect water and sewer lines. They would face condemnation, otherwise. Landlords responded by evicting their tenants. A suit filed by North Mississippi Rural Legal Services blocked some evictions, but some of the Sugar Ditch tenants were subjected to attacks that included the beating of a ten-year-old child by three white adult men.

Bricks were thrown at homes; guns were fired around the neighborhood at night; and at least one home owner attempted arson on one of the houses. After CBS's *Sixty Minutes*, NBC's *Nightly News*, and hundreds of newspapers covered the Tunica story, Mississippi officials brought in trailers to house the affected residents while the NAACP worked with FmHA to finance a new forty-unit apartment complex outside city limits. <sup>xli</sup>

The abandonment of federal regulatory oversight in counties such as Tunica has allowed the plantation bloc system of regulation to flourish. For example, NAHSE discovered that the city spent or planned to spend more than \$1 million in federal neighborhood redevelopment funds on downtown beautification and for a barrier to block off Sugar Ditch from sightseers rather than on provision of basic services. It also found that black patients had been denied treatment at Tunica County Hospital; it mattered little whether or not they were in the middle of labor or whether they were bleeding from gunshot wounds. According to syndicated columnist Alfreda Madison, Tunica "is a prime example that President Reagan's New Federalism won't work. It is only a revival of the old states' rights policy."<sup>xlii</sup>

In many ways, Tunica represented the crisis of black community life in the Delta. While the region is widely known as having one of the highest infant mortality rates in the nation, the relationship between infant mortality and agriculture is rarely mentioned.

"Deadly pesticides such as DDT were used to carpet the Delta during the 1950s and 1960s. Banned pesticides are still secretly used and approved pesticides are improperly applied," Woods stated. "National, state, and local public health officials have yet to act upon a growing body of evidence that suggests that pesticide poisoning in the South from the 1920s onward has created a massive health crisis that affects African Americans of every age in every region of the United States."<sup>xliii</sup>

THE THIRD PART of Woods's Mississippi trilogy revolves around the eleven-hundred-member African American workforce at Delta Pride catfish processing that in 1986 voted to join Local 1529 of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, the largest local in Memphis. Organization of the Indianola plant was accomplished despite the firing of a dozen union organizers, physical threats, and a pre-election party where prominent blues performers entertained workers. Several catfish processing plants were closed in Belzoni and Tunica, meanwhile, to break the unionization efforts.

Delta Pride, the largest catfish processor in the world, was owned by 180 plantation owners who turned part of their lands over to growing the fish in huge, excavated shallow ponds. By 1986, the \$650 million a year industry employed four thousand workers, generating an annual payroll of \$40 million. Approximately 85 percent of the catfish consumed in the United States is produced and processed in Mississippi.<sup>xliv</sup>

As annual sales reached \$875 million by 1990, production workers were paid \$4.05 an hour. They received no holidays and no benefits. Reportedly, male supervisors often followed women employees into the door-less bathrooms – to make sure they quickly returned to the assembly line, and it was common for the women to suffer cuts and loss of fingers. They worked all day in ankle-deep water filleting 300 pounds of catfish each. Many workers were being permanently crippled by carpal tunnel syndrome as well.

Two thousand members of Local 1529 authorized a strike of Delta Pride outside of Indianola on September 13, 1990 after rejecting the firm's final contract offer. This began the largest strike of African American employees in Mississippi history. Strikers were threatened with criminal prosecution for picketing.

Ten were arrested following a scuffle with police and Indianola police beat one woman picketer. Shots were fired at a building where a union meeting was taking place. The mayor of Indianola, during the conflict, resigned as Delta Pride's Lawyer, a position he had held since 1981, six years before he became mayor.<sup>xlv</sup>

Then in an October hearing before the Congressional Black Caucus, workers complained of being forced to process "moldy green fish" and of "machines caked with fecal matter."

The chair of the hearing ... accused Rep. Mike Espy of being a 'gigolo' for not standing up for his constituents and for trying to prevent the hearing from occurring. Considered the strongest congressional promoter of the catfish industry, and an ally of the Delta Council and other agribusiness groups, Espy argued that the intervention by the Congressional Black Caucus was not necessary because it would give the 'impression that it is a racial situation when it is largely economic.' This race-is-not-a-factor argument was repeated almost verbatim by the company's president.<sup>xlvi</sup>

After the Congressional Black Caucus sent a letter to the Delta Pride president advising him that "compromise, not confrontations, is the course Delta Pride should be pursuing at the moment," Delta Pride workers quickly organized a nationwide supermarket boycott of the company's catfish fillets. The effort attracted national attention and was seen by some as the possible birth of a new movement.

A strike settlement was reached in December 1990. Most of the workers were rehired, likely due to the plant's high turnover but nothing was really gained for these plant workers or other agricultural employees.

Historian Woods points to a deepening crisis in agriculture and manufacturing that eroded agricultural profitability and had already begun to affect the Delta – starting in the 1980s; this farm crisis would lead into to eventual restructuring of the entire agricultural political economy. As top farm machine manufacturers were failing – Allis Chalmers, Massey Ferguson and International Harvester – the General Accounting Office reported 7,415 farm delinquencies in Mississippi.

With the second-highest debt load in the nation, Mississippi planters, ranchers, and farmers owed more than \$1.5 billion in loan repayments to the FmHA. For many, federal subsidies had become the sole source of profit.<sup>xlvii</sup> These payments to farmers for not producing became subject to a growing attack in Congress by representatives of urban and suburban districts, an attack that was continued in 2005 by the Bush administration.

The Delta plantation bloc, using its powerful political ties, has nonetheless maintained the federal government's commitment to rice and cotton export promotion. One major effort was to introduce Arkansas and Mississippi rice, more than 60 percent of U. S. production, into Japan, while another program subsidizes China's Mississippi and Arkansas cotton purchases.

With total sales of \$1 billion in 1990, Dunnivant Enterprises of Memphis, the world's largest cotton broker, completed the world's largest cotton sale ever to China in 1990 – 500,000 bales worth \$200 million.

### *In Celebration of Medgar Evers*

A small group of civil rights leaders shared their thoughts and memories of the late Medgar Evers in Jackson's daily newspaper in June of 1988. Their stories were requested by *The Clarion-Ledger* as special recognition of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Evers assassination.

Darrell Kenyatta Evers told how the murder of his father resulted in his own deep spiritual experience that he did not understand until later years. "I was affected for the rest of my life."<sup>xlviii</sup> Evers was working as a professional artist in Los Angeles specializing in abstract painting.

John Salter said the life and death of Evers caused him to dedicate his life to serve others. "He set the kind of example that helped people like myself go on into a lifetime of activism." Salter spoke from the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, N.D., where he was the chair of Indian Studies.

Ed Cole, the first black chair of the state Democratic Party, told the Jackson reporter that Evers' slaying marked a personal turning point. "I was going to go to college. I hadn't really thought of the ability to have a career in Mississippi, said Cole, an administrative assistant in U. S. Rep. Mike Parker's Jackson office. "The tragedy of his death probably made me make a commitment not to leave Mississippi."

Cleve McDowell, an Ole Miss law school student at the time of Evers' death, recalled his devastation: "I had followed him all over the state at various civil rights meetings. It was just one of those tragedies that was hard to accept. I was bitter for a long time.... It seemed like something that could have been avoided. It didn't have to happen."

McDowell's resolve was strengthened as he absorbed himself by working for the NAACP. "It made me mad enough not to take a back seat thereafter."

Many would claim they marched with Evers, but "the vast majority of people stayed hidden," McDowell recalled. "He did much of what he did with young people and a handful of faithful followers."

In this interview, McDowell spoke of a need for creating a watchdog group to locate and identify persons responsible for civil rights murders, "just as Nazi war criminals were prosecuted."

"There ought to be some organization to track them down.... Right now some of those people are smiling and grinning in our faces and asking us to vote for them." McDowell did not elaborate.

But stacked in the corner of his Drew office was a growing mound of boxes filled with files holding notes and reports. The same was true of McDowell's coffee table at home: between the two sites were every piece of paper McDowell had collected that had to do with a murder, lynching or some other civil rights-based crime.

McDowell and two other lawyers ("perhaps Texans who went to school with Cleve"<sup>xlix</sup>) were doing their own investigations – from the murder of Emmett Till, Medgar Evers and forward, gathering every piece of information they could lay their hands on to solve crimes against black people, local, state and national.

*The 1990s*

By 1990, Mississippi and civil rights seemed to be progressing in many ways. But for every two steps forward, there were always two or three steps taken back ...

Annual sales for Delta Pride – the world’s largest catfish-processing concern – reached \$875 million that year. The industry’s total economic impact upon the state economy was estimated at \$2 billion.

On December 14, 1990, a Hinds County grand jury indicted Byron De La Beckwith for murder in the slaying of NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers. Fate finally caught up with Beckwith four years later on February 5, 1994, when a Panola County jury sitting in Jackson convicted the Greenwood Klansman of murder. Beckwith was sentenced to life in prison, where he died.

For the first time, in February of 1993, the state’s Commission on Human Rights Abuse held public hearings on jail lynchings and other abuses by law enforcement officials in. In testimony given by a former deputy sheriff in Harrison County Jail and Youth Detention Facility in Gulfport, Mississippi, Andrea Gibbs said, "I've personally seen dozens of beatings of black, white and Nicaraguan detainees. [I've seen them] kicked, strangled, slapped, punched, stabbed." When Gibbs and three African American deputies told their superiors about their intentions to report these abuses, they were fired.

During the summer of that year, as many as fourteen separate home and apartment fires were reported in Drew, from July 24 through August 18. The first fire occurred at an apartment owned by Cleve McDowell. City Police Chief Burner Smith and Capt. Robinson issued a warrant against [name illegible, not McDowell] citing four counts of arson after he was “placed at the scene by witnesses” at several fires.

But Chief Smith also reported an “indication” the property owner, McDowell, “was under pressure by some unknown parties who were attempting to place fear in the attorney to get some type of service out of McDowell.... In several interviews with residents in the area, the general feeling for the rash of fires was merely an attempt made by attorney McDowell, having had several of his employees do his dirt in an attempt to collect a sizeable amount of insurance money.”

No actions were taken against McDowell. The lengthy report was delivered “a judge” who “deep-sixed it, after giving Cleve a copy,” said McDowell’s former office manager.

In 1995, the Mississippi Knights of the Ku Klux Klan planned a rally in Greenwood supporting legislative proposals to end affirmative action and [to propose] the quarantine of all HIV patients. One hundred Klansmen were present for this meeting on June 27, 1995, including Sam Bowers and other officers. The group voted to send \$500 to “the man” who was charged with killing a black deputy sheriff at Bogalusa, La.<sup>1</sup>

IN THE SPRING of 1997, Cleve McDowell, described by James Meredith, as a “bright and articulate” civil rights lawyer and activist, was shot and killed in his Drew home on March 13.

McDowell, 55, a former state field director of the Mississippi Conference of the NAACP, had represented clients in civil rights cases over three decades. He was a member of the state Penitentiary Board from 1971 until 1976 and served as state director for Head Start from 1972 to 1976. He was a Sunflower County judge from 1978 to 1982 and ran unsuccessfully for the Legislature in 1978 and 1987.

Hearing the news of McDowell's murder, Myrlie Evers-Williams told *Clarion-Ledger* reporter Eric Stringfellow that she first met McDowell when he was a student at Jackson State involved in the NAACP and "was speechless" when told of his death.

"All I can say is I'm shocked and saddened. My strongest memories are when he applied to Ole Miss and the difficulties and the harassment and how proud I think the entire community was.

"He was one of the few who would mention Medgar as a role model, and he did it during a time when others wouldn't mention Medgar – either they had forgotten or chose to forget. Whenever Cleve would speak, he would always mention something about Medgar," Evers-Williams said.<sup>li</sup>

"The streets are quieter now in Drew," mused one old friend of McDowell's. "Cleve was so bright and he was a true character. Every so often, he would 'fire' his secretary. She'd stomp home, carrying her pink purse. I can see it now. Sometimes Cleve called out after her, saying he was really sorry and asking her to come back. Other times, he would be seen a few minutes later walking to her house – sort of like he was crawling there begging her to come back to work."

On August 21, 1997, nineteen-year-old Juarez Webb of Indianola was indicted by Sunflower County grand jurors on charges of capital murder and robbery of McDowell. And for several months, the charges stuck.

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- <sup>i</sup> Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission file(s) SCR ID # 2-13-0-65-2-1-1.
- <sup>ii</sup> Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission file(s) SCR ID # 1-112-0-36-1-1-1; SCR ID # 1-118-0-3-1-1-1.
- <sup>iii</sup> In an FBI memo to W.C. Sullivan from G.C. Moore dated May 14, 1970, regarding CONINTELPRO operations against “Black Nationalist – Hate Groups,” Moore states that “Articles concerning the BPP based on information furnished a news media source in Mississippi resulted in the closing of a BPP Chapter in Cleveland, Mississippi.” Moore further recommends that the COINTELPRO against “black extremists” be continued. P. 149, Churchill & Vander Wall.
- <sup>iv</sup> Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission file(s) SCR ID # 1-112-0-36-1-1-1; SCR ID # 1-118-0-3-1-1-1.
- <sup>v</sup> Block, *ibid*.
- <sup>vi</sup> Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, “Weekly Report, 04-13-70 – 04-17-70,” James M. Mohead, SCR ID # 8-20-2-4-2-1-1. Thirty years later, a Humphreys County jury convicted James “Doc” Caston of Satartia, his brother Charles E. Caston of Holly Bluff, and their half-brother, Hal Crimm of Vicksburg, of manslaughter in the killing of Poole, a one-armed sharecropper. Joe Oliver Watson of Rolling Fork pleaded guilty to manslaughter and testified against the others
- <sup>vii</sup> Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission file(s) SCR ID # 2-92-0-43-1-1-1; SCR ID # 2-92-0-43-2-1-1; SCR ID # 2-92-0-44-1-1-1.
- <sup>viii</sup> From several letters found in Aaron Henry’s papers, then housed at Tougaloo College.
- <sup>ix</sup> Letter on the stationery of Tucker, Morris, DePrater and White, Memphis, dated January 12, 1971, to Maxine Smith, NAACP, Memphis. From the Aaron Henry collection.
- <sup>x</sup> Letter on NAACP stationery, Memphis office, dated January 14, 1971, to Aaron Henry, NAACP. From the Aaron Henry collection.
- <sup>xi</sup> State Sovereignty Commission file(s) SCR ID # 1-118-0-16-1-1-1; SCR ID # 8-20-2-82-2-1-1; SCR ID # 8-20-2-82-3-1-1; FBI in Drew to determine possible civil rights violations SCR ID # 8-20-2-82-4-1-1; two men freed SCR ID # 8-20-2-84-1-1-1.
- <sup>xii</sup> Associated Press news story (copy with no title), June 11, 1971, *Frederick, Maryland News*, A-9.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Associated Press, “1,300 Attend Funeral For Murdered Girl,” carried in the *Daily Tribune*, Great Bend, Kan., May 31, 1971. A separate AP account places the number in attendance at 2,000.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Associated Press, *Frederick, Maryland News*.
- <sup>xv</sup> UPI, “Three Charged in Slaying of Girl,” *Evening Sentinel* of Holland, Mich., May 27, 1971, 10.
- <sup>xvi</sup> *The Clarion-Ledger*. Undated article from a clipping file.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Letter to the Sunflower County Prosecutor from the Aaron Henry Collection, Tougaloo College.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Anonymous interview conducted by Susan Klopfer, November 2004.
- <sup>xix</sup> Mississippi Sovereignty Commission file SCR ID # 8-20-2-82-3-1-1
- <sup>xx</sup> SCR ID # 8-19-2-67-1-1-1; Drew incident drawing interest away from this murder SCR ID # 8-19-2-67-2-1-1; no indictment by grand jury SCR ID # 99-130-0-19-1-1-1.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Handwritten letter to Aaron Henry, State President of the NAACP, from a “Mrs. Stotts” dated: December 2, 1972. The actual name on the copy is nearly illegible but looks something like “Isoar Mernough Stotts.” From Aaron Henry’s collection.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Waldron, 325.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> From an email interview with Charles Sudduth, May 7, 2005. Sudduth names the city official. I’ve chosen not to share the name since there was no formal indictment. A former mayor of Hollandale, Helen Perkins, told this author she also heard of these murders but knew few details.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Posted in 2004 on the “Clark S. Dale” bulletin board in Clarksdale. Printed by permission of the author who is an African American and requested anonymity.
- <sup>xxv</sup> From a sworn, notarized affidavit regarding the arrest of Aaron Henry on Saturday, September 18, 1976. Aaron Henry collection.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Anne Braden later credited the MFDP with originating the idea of parallel institutions. “In a real sense, the movement (anti-Vietnam policy) is a grandchild of the southern civil rights movement. Many who are most active worked first in Mississippi. Their

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songs are freedom songs – with new words. This reflects a concept that is capturing the imagination of many young people – parallel institutions – that people set up when society’s existing institutions do not meet their need. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party first gave them the idea.” From Anne Braden, *Peace and Freedom News*, September 13, 1965, publication of the *National Coordinating Committee to End The War in Vietnam*.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Peter Maass, “The Secrets of Mississippi: Post-authoritarian shock in the South,” *The New Republic* magazine (online), December 21, 1998.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxx</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxxxi</sup> Email conversation with Dr. Salter, May 9, 2005.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Woods, 220-224.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Conversation with Margaret Block, March 2005.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Douglas Martin (NYT), “Defiant ‘60s civil rights fighter Block dies,” April 22, 2000, *The Memphis Commercial Appeal*.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Branch. Also, at the time of Block’s death, his long-time friend Wazir Peacock spoke of their “diametrically different strategies” for an oral history collected by the Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement. Block “wasn’t much on detail, that’s what I did. Sam cooked up new projects faster than I could put up the details for them. He would recruit help from the young ladies who came by the office. We bailed each other out in many different ways. After Greenwood began to open up, we were invited by some of the Black leadership in Holmes County to do voter registration there. So we opened that up and began taking people down to register. Then we went into Humphreys County, which was next to Holmes, in the Delta, also to do voter registration. Sam was at the top of my list of best friends. He was one of my heroes and he was my brother. I always had a saying, if you see Sam in a bear-fight, help the bear! Because he was a bear-killer. It’s hard to believe the bear-killer is dead. To me, I don’t think he will ever be dead.”

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Woods, 325. Note 2.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>xl</sup> Woods, 224.

<sup>xli</sup> Some critics believed this was an attempt to dilute black voting strength in Tunica. Woods characterizes the Tunica story as “emblematic of the numerous Southern communities that the civil rights era passed by.”

<sup>xlii</sup> Woods, 226.

<sup>xliii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xliv</sup> Woods, 229. Cites *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, September 25, 1990, and October 21, 1990.

<sup>xlv</sup> Woods, 230. Cites *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, September 25, 1990, November 21, 1990.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Ibid. Cites *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, October 13, 1990, October 21, 1990.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Woods, 231. Cites (untitled articles) *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, July 10, 1991, October 8, 1990, and September 4, 1990.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Clipping from *The Clarion-Ledger*, June 8, 1988.

<sup>xlix</sup> From a telephone interview with the Godson of Cleve McDowell, Kwasi McDowell, by Susan Klopfer in the fall of 2004.

McDowell said that his uncle never talked about what he was working on, except for one time. Kwasi said he was writing a civil rights paper for school and Cleve McDowell was helping him. While he was writing, Cleve McDowell looked away and quietly said, “People in this state would be surprised if they knew about all the politicians and their families who have murdered people.” ... “He didn’t say anything else, but he looked upset.” Kwasi McDowell also stated that Cleve may have been working with two lawyers in Texas at one time to track down civil rights murderers. “I think both of those lawyers died in car wrecks, but I don’t recall any specifics. I’m not sure if this is true or not.”

<sup>1</sup> Data from Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League.

<sup>ii</sup> Eric Stringfellow, “McDowell may have been killed by teen client,” *The Clarion-Ledger*, March 15, 1997, 3-B.