

White House Staff Files, Lee White, Box 23
"Mississippi 4/8/63-10/20/63"

Department of Justice

Washington

8 April 1963

MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESIDENT

Re: Civil Rights Commission Resolution

The following are the specific events in Mississippi referred to by the Commission, together with a report on what action has been taken:

1. "Citizens of the United States have been shot. . . ." This probably refers to a shooting in Leflore County on February 28th of a registration worker named Travis. The FBI commenced an immediate full investigation. So did local authorities. Two men and a 17-year old boy have been arrested and charged under state law. The matter will be presented to a state grand jury in May. If the state does not take effective action, federal charges will be presented, although the only federal crime involved is intimidating a person in connection with the exercise of the franchise, and that is simply a misdemeanor.

There has been in the past six months one other incident in which injuries were sustained. The Bureau has made a full investigation but has not discovered who did that. It is obviously very difficult to find out who fires shots into a house at night. There have also been shots fired without injury to anyone. Again the Bureau on each occasion has been asked to make every effort to determine the persons responsible. There is no suggestion that any local or state official of Mississippi is involved in any of these matters.

2. "...set upon by vicious dogs...." This refers to the use of a police dog in Greenwood last week. The dog bit a minister in the leg. This is one of the incidents upon which we based a lawsuit which was filed two days later against the Greenwood police. As that matter rests, the Greenwood police have ceased interference with registration activity, and in fact, on Friday, transported Negro applicants to and from the Courthouse in city buses.

The use of police dogs is not a prohibited police activity. They are used in the District of Columbia, among other places.

3. "...beaten and otherwise terrorized because they sought to vote...." I do not know what specific incidents are referred to. There were some incidents in southern Mississippi in the summer of 1961, in one of which a Negro registration worker was pistol-whipped by the registrar of Walthall County. We brought a successful case in that instance and attempt to act as promptly as possible on any incident involving voting when we can find out who is responsible.

4. "Since the postponement of the Commission's October hearing, students have been fired upon, ministers have been assaulted and the home of the Vice-Chairman of the State Advisory Committee to this Commission has been bombed." The first two matters are discussed in paragraphs numbered 1 and 2 above. It has not been possible to find out who was responsible for the bombing, which took place last October. The FBI has pursued every possibility. Again, there is no suggestion that state or local officials were involved.

5. "Another member and his wife were jailed on trumped-up charges after his home had been defiled." This matter was thoroughly investigated both by the Commission and by the Department of Justice. The Department agreed to undertake the defense of the man in state court. This proved unnecessary because the charges were dropped by the state authorities after

investigation by the local prosecuting attorney. We are still investigating the possibility of bringing federal charges against those responsible for the false accusation.

6. "Even children, at the brink of starvation, have been deprived of assistance by the callous and discriminatory acts of Mississippi officials administering federal funds." Late last year the officials of Leflore County decided not to undertake surplus food distribution on a large-scale basis this winter, as had been done in the past. The charge was made that this decision was connected with voter registration work. Four lawyers from the Department of Justice were sent to determine whether there was a large-scale need for food, particularly among Negro families. Their investigation, which consisted of a survey including interviews with a large number of families, showed deplorable conditions and inadequate diet. As a result, the Department of Agriculture informed the County that unless the County resumed food distribution itself, the federal government would do so directly. The County resumed the distribution of food week before last. It is now being done at federal expense.

The charge has been made also that the school lunch program is being administered in a fashion which discriminates against Negro school children. The staff of the Commission itself is undertaking an investigation to find out if this is true. The Department of Justice has no facts on this charge at present.

7. Federal funds.

There is another memorandum as to what area of discretion exists on the items listed.

The existing airport in Jackson was desegre-
gated so that we would otherwise

