

Meridian

Meridian Community Center
513 25th Ave.
Meridian, Mississippi
March 18, 1965

Mr. James Farmer
National Director
Congress of Racial Equality
38 Park Row
New York 38, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Farmer;

This letter is to request your aid and the aid of the Congress of Racial Equality in preventing the unjust exclusion of a major part of the Negro community in Meridian from participation in planning the use of federal funds that will be coming into Meridian under Title II of the 1964 Economic Opportunities Act.

As provided in the bill, a local committee has been set up to seek the funds. This committee is chaired by Judge Maniesse and co-chaired by Mr. Charles Young. Mr. Young is a Negro business man, introduced at a recent meeting as "our local tycoon." We do not believe that his interests coincide with those of the great majority of Meridian Negroes.

Our complaint is that none of the organizations that actually speak for the oppressed Negroes of Meridian were even invited to, or notified of the existence of, a recent meeting at which the local committee was formed. These organizations include: The Meridian Community Center, the Meridian Steering Committee of the Council of Federated Organizations and the Lauderdale County Executive Committee of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. I want it to be clear that no representation is being sought by us for staff employees of these groups but only for local people who serve on the committees that determine the policies and actions of the groups. For example the Community Center would probably be represented by Mrs. Fannie Lee Chaney, whose son, James Chaney, was active in the organization of the center until his death this summer.

Because these groups were not present at the meeting at which the local committee to seek funds was formed, the information that follows may not be as accurate as we would wish. I received this information at second hand from one of those present at the meeting. The person who gave me the information has asked that neither her name nor that of the man present at the meeting be disclosed. The information is, however, confirmed by the general belief of the community.

Mr. Young was, at first, to be the only Negro on the committee. However, at the insistence of the white members of the committee, three additional members of the Negro race were asked to join. These include some of the following; Mrs. Whitlock, owner of a florist shop and beauty parlor; Reverend R. S. Porter, a leading Negro Minister; Mr. Albert Jones, a restaurateur; and Reverend Barbour, vice president of the Meridian Branch of the NAACP. These people ably represent the Negro business and professional groups in this city. We do not believe that they represent the great number

of Negro workmen and unemployed.

A group called the Lauderdale County Democratic Club (not the regular white Democratic organization) which is generally known as Mr. Young's organization, and in which Reverend Porter is also active, has been conducting a membership drive based on the alleged fact that many of the anti-poverty benefits would be funneled through that group to its members.

Therefore, Mr. Farmer, we ask your aid in informing Washington that the committee has been so set up as to give the appearance of remarkable inter-racial harmony for this state; but that in fact these who represent the Negro community at large, rather than its more affluent members, have been excluded. We ask that the committee, as now constituted, not be granted recognition by the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Sincerely,

Eric Weinberger
Director, Meridian Community Center

cc: Marvin Rich
Richard Haley
Richard Jewett