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August 14 [1963]

Dear Senator Eastland:

I am sure that you are aware that for the past year, an intensive effort has been made in Sunflower County Mississippi - your home county - to encourage Negroes to register to vote, and vote. Today marks the end of one year of activity in sunflower County, with our efforts focused on Ruleville, where I understand you maintain an office, as well as a plantation in nearby Doddville, and the beginning of a second year. It has been a year of hard work, violent, physical and economic reprisals, intimidations and harrassments; jailings, and silence on your part. Feeling somewhat uncertain of your concern for the situation in Sunflower County and ^{CERTAIN OF} your lack of understanding of the inevitability of the situation, I feel ^{Moved} ~~compelled~~, on this the first anniversary of CHANGE in Sunflower County, to write to you on the nature of this change, and the need for change.

Sunflower County, like all Delta counties, has an economy based on cotton, and a population that is roughly two thirds Negro. These Negroes are finding that ~~what~~ with the rapid mechanization of the cotton fields, ~~the~~ the need for their labor is past. However, the education of the Negro is not keeping pace with the automation of the county. I call your attention to Mississippi Vocational College (Negro), ^{in Effingham County} which still teaches the shoeing of horses, and would advise you to check on the money spent for the education of a Negro student per year, as compared with the money spent on the education of a white student per year. Negroes have been fleeing North at an incredible rate in search of jobs, unaware

of the mountainous employment problems there, and the inability of the north to absorb large numbers of uneducated masses in search of employment. This has led to the ghetto, and all the bitterness, crime, and disease that one finds there; and it has led concerned persons south, to Mississippi, to stem this tide (which is not only black, but white also --- the white population in Sunflower County has decreased by 3,142 persons between the years 1950 and 1960, and the nonwhite population has decreased by 7,139 persons over the same period of time). In Massachusetts - where I came from - I could feel a ~~kintraf~~ danger to the whole country emanating from this state, and being concerned, I came (if for nothing else, to see what it was). I see now.

Unfortunately Senator Eastland (and I know this may be tough for you to take, what with your strong emotional ties to this state, to say nothing of your economic ties to the system), virtually every person in Mississippi, in a position of political and economic power (~~naturally~~ ^{is} ~~xxx~~ white) is making a determined effort to disenfranchise the Negro of a voice in w the affairs of a state in which he composes neary half the population. Your county - Sunflower County - is not excluded.

~~xxxxxx~~, There are 13,000 Negroes of voting age in Sunflower County, 166 of these are registered to vote. One year ago today, field secretaries for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee came to Ruleville to encourage Negroes to register to vote. Within a period of one month, the voting program undertaken there met resistance ranging from verbal threats to shootings.

The Mayor of Ruleville, C.M. Derrough, has openly stated that he is against Negroes registering to vote, or voting. The registrar's office in Indianola has been closed several times on such dubious excuses as "he's at the bus station seeing off a friend". Negroes who had attempted to register to vote found it difficult to get relief aid. Persons have been thrown off plantations on which they worked, for attempting to register. Most recently, when three voter registration workers (myself included) went to the polls during the August 6th Democratic Primary, to talk with the election manager about becoming poll watchers, and to check with him on his position regarding the use of affidavits by citizens who felt that they were being denied the right to vote, they were arrested in front of the polling place (which is the same place that the "hite Citizens Council meets), and charged by the Mayor with "conspiring to interfere with voting an& an election". The workers in addition to being arrested and charged by Mayor Derrough, were prosecuted, judged, and sentenced by the Mayor, and given ~~no~~ chance to obtain a lawyer, or testify. You as a member of a lawmaking body, certainly must be outraged at this injustice. I as a voter registration worker who has worked in Sunflower County, find this typical.

Those of us who are here in the Mississippi Delta working, are of the opinion that with out complete and immediate support from the federal government (this includes the Senate), our efforts are seriously handicapped. The active support of state leaders (especially those who have read the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the United States Constitution) whould be a major

breakthrough in the wall that separates the Negro from his civil rights and liberties. I would suggest that you support and use your influence the requests of Mississippi Negroes for:

1. The use of federal marshalls in areas where Negroes face physical danger for attempting to register and vote; and federal troops if necessary
2. the appointment of federal voting referees to insure that Negroes are not discriminated against when attempting to register to vote.
3. The removal of the literacy test and poll tax, as well as the ending of the publishing the names of applicants attempting to register to vote
4. More suits filed by the Justice department to stop ^{the} harrassment and intimidation as well as discrimination of Negroes who would like to register to vote.
5. Support of the President's civil rights bill.
6. The Jailing of Ross Barnett and Paul Johnson.

With your help, and the help of persons like you, we can gain the voting franchise, and with the voting franchise, gain the economic franchise, for a people with votes, means politions concerned about the use of those votes.

On a local level, you might encourage Negroes on your plantation to register to vote. ^{for} I don't believe that any have registered yet. You might use your influence with plantation owners in the county, to see to it that "their Negroes" register to vote.

Hoping you will cooperate with these requests, I remain

Disrespectfully yours,

Charles Cobb