

Burke Marshall Papers Box 32
Demonstrations, Sept.-Dec. 1963

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Memorandum

TO : Burke Marshall
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division

FROM : Jerome K. Heilbron
Attorney

DATE: Sept. 9, 1963
JKH:lah
144-19M-558
14,272

SUBJECT: Racial Situation, Americus, Georgia, August 20, 1963.

I arrived in Albany, Georgia shortly after noon on August 20, 1963. I went to the F.B.I. office in Albany to discuss with Mr. Bolyard, SAC, the situation in Americus, Georgia. While in the office, the F.B.I. received a report from the state police that a Negro by the name of James Brown had been killed by a city policeman in Americus, Georgia. I conveyed this information by phone to John Doar, and he suggested that we investigate the matter immediately.

I drove to Americus, Georgia and was unable to see the Solicitor General, Steve Pace, Jr. (with whom I have had prior dealings) because he was tied up with a grand jury proceeding. I went to the headquarters of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in Americus, the John Barnum Funeral Home at 317 Ashby Street, Americus. I had a long conversation with Mr. John L. Barnum.

The most active Negro group in Sumter County is the "Sumter County Movement for Fair Play". Its officers are:

The Sumter County Movement:

S. M. Evans, President
P. O. Box
Cobbs, Georgia
853-2365

Rev. J. R. Campbell
Chairman of Executive Board
107 Lester Street
Americus, Georgia
924-5972

John L. Barnum, Treasurer
Funeral Director
317 Ashby Street
Americus, Georgia
924-2958
Satisfied that the Negro community, as a
whole, might be aroused and that
violence. The following
concerned with various members of the
Sumter County movement and also with the Chief of
Police and the Mayor Pro Tem Mr. J. A. Collins.
Mrs. Theressa Shields, Secretary
439 Mayo Street
Americus, Georgia
924-5356
Satisfied to the Negro community that James
Brown was a justifiable homicide and not a
killing, and 2) that the city officials and
the Chief of Police should communicate with the
After leaving the Barnum Funeral Home, I was
able to locate Steve Pace, Jr. by phone, and made
an appointment to see him that evening at my motel.
I explained to him that we were concerned about the
racial unrest in Americus and I wanted to find out
from him whom I might see in the white community
with a view to resolving difficulties. He discussed
the local situation with me and gave me his views
concerning various city officials.

EVALUATION AND PROGRESSION:

The two F.B.I. agents making the investiga-
tion concerning the death of James Brown gave me the
results of their interview with the Chief of Police,
of Americus, Ross Chambliss. Their report indicated
that there was no evidence of violation of federal
law; however, the report was based on hearsay. I
requested that they, as long as they were already
in Americus, talk to two eye witnesses to the killing.
They felt that they shouldn't do this without further
approval from their office since their orders were
to limit their preliminary investigation to obtaining
information from police sources. I told them that I
would be glad to get them such approval by talking
to anyone they might suggest in Atlanta, or by calling
someone in Washington. I emphasized strongly that I
felt this was a situation that required them to talk
to two "eyeball witnesses" before we could close out
a preliminary investigation. They called the Atlanta
office and I talked to the agent on duty and he ok'ed
the talking to additional witnesses subject to his
getting approval from F.B.I. Headquarters, Washington.
Final approval was obtained and the two witnesses
were interviewed that evening, as I requested. These
accounts of the incident confirmed the report given
by the Chief of Police and indicated there was no
violation of federal law; this appeared to be a
justifiable homicide.

I was afraid that the Negro community, as a result of this killing, might be aroused and that the end result might be violence. The following morning, I conferred with various members of the Sumter County Movement and also with the Chief of Police and the Mayor Pro Tem, Mr. J. A. Collins. My objective was twofold: 1) to make certain that it became apparent to the Negro community that James Brown's death was a justifiable homicide and not a brutal killing, and 2) that the city officials and the Chief of Police should communicate with the Negro community so that steps might be taken to resolve difficulties.

Contacts were made with the Chief of Police and the Coroner to make certain that leaders in the Sumter County Movement could attend the inquest that afternoon at 3:00 relative to the death of James Brown. Three Negroes attended that inquest.

Evaluation and Impressions:

The Sheriff in Sumter County, Fred Chappell, is hardheaded and takes a rough attitude toward Negroes. The Chief of Police, Ross Chambliss, is more moderate in his approach toward Negroes than the Sheriff, but he is not overly intelligent. The Sumter County Movement represents a minor segment of the Negro community as a whole and most of its actions stem from SNCC students. John L. Barnum, its ostensible leader, appears to be somewhat irresponsible. (On the first day I saw him, he told me he played poker most of the previous night). I am told that he is more than an occasional drinker. He was supposed to have been at the funeral home at 11:00 on August 21, but by early afternoon he had not shown up and no-one knew where he was. His sister, Mrs. Holley, seems to be the person who takes the most responsible part in running the funeral home. Rev. Campbell is the only Negro minister in Americus actively participating in the Sumter County Movement. Mrs. Shields, the Executive Secretary of the Movement, is a school teacher who plans to withdraw from the Movement activities when school starts. She teaches in Barrow County.

OPEN LETTER TO THE

HONORABLE ~~THE CITY COUNCIL~~, MAYOR OF AMERICUS, GA.
Griffin Walker - Mayor, Walker Nail Company

12 August 1963

Dear Sirs: Collins - Mayor Pro Tem, Bell Telephone Co.

Dear Sirs: Hollis Blackmon - Partner McClockey Mills

Hollis Blackmon - Partner McClockey Mills
as representatives of the Sumter County Movement,
take this opportunity ^{Americus} Baker Yases and purposes of
Theo Baldwin our organization.

Johnny Sheffield, III - Partner Sheffield Hardware

Violence shall be the foundation of peaceful
action and the end toward ~~Citizens~~ Bank directed. We
believe that just social order cannot exist unless all
citizens of the ~~com~~ Bynum Laundry are assured of protection from
violence, and unless the great majority of citizens respect
the right of each individual to personal, social, economic,
and political security.

We therefore submit that the following practices
should be instituted immediately for the benefit of every
citizen of Americus and Sumter County:

1) All facilities which are publicly owned or
operated to serve the public at large should be opened to any-
one who wishes to avail himself of their services, regardless
of race, color, or creed.

"We the people, by virtue of the Constitution of the United
States of America, do believe that there is a right
of assembly, a right of peaceful protest, a right to
dissent, but above all, we believe we enumerate these rights among
many others. These are rights which are inalienable, which
should not be obstructed or frustrated by executive,
legislative, or judicial agencies. Further, there is an
affirmative responsibility of government occupying positions
under those headings to enforce and implement these rights.
When they fail to do so, they actually make a mockery of
the Constitution of the United States, but they sow the
seeds of anarchy.

3) Every individual who applies for a job should be
on the basis solely of his mental and physical qualification
for the job, regardless of race, color, or creed.
Temporary or permanent dismissal of employees as well should
rest solely on the principle of qualification. Economic
freedom and security are essential to equality, liberty,
and the pursuit of happiness.

4) Each individual should display and receive the
respect for life and dignity which his humanness deserves.