

## Canton Story

This is a brief rundown of the events of the last few days in Canton, Miss. Appended is a list of the people arrested; their names, ages and the charges against them, where known; and a copy of the telegrams sent to the Justice Department.

January 21, 1964 (Tuesday)

The City Council of Canton passed a law making it a criminal offense to distribute literature without a permit from the mayor and chief of police. Such laws have been held unconstitutional in the federal courts, in cases arising elsewhere in Mississippi.

January 22, 1964 (Wednesday)

George Washington, prominent and wealthy Canton citizen, and treasurer of the Madison County Movement (the local committee which has been conducting a highly successful selective buying campaign in Madison County), was arrested on a charge of burning trash on the sidewalk. He posted \$250.00 bond and was released.

January 23, 1964 (Thursday)

Two persons were arrested for violating the city's building code. This arose apparently, out of efforts by the staff of the Council of Federated Organizations (a unity civil rights group consisting of SNCC, CORE, SCLC and NAACP which has field workers from CORE AND SNCC working in Canton) to repair their new community center. Jim Collier, a SNCC field secretary, had been making minor repairs and was in the building at the time of his arrest. Clarence Chinn, age about forty, of Canton, was also arrested and charged with the building code violation, although he has not had anything to do with the repair of the community center. He is, however, the brother of a CORE Task Force worker in Canton.

Early in the day, C.O. Chinn, a CORE staff worker, and Clarence Chinn's brother, was arrested for disturbing the peace. The circumstances of his arrest are not presently known. Theodis Hewitt, also, was arrested for "disturbing the peace of the general public," and "intimidating an officer" as well. That afternoon from the county jail, C.O. Chinn and Theodis Hewitt complained that they had been given the "hot box" treatment (turning on the heat until the cell is stiflingly hot) until they were both ill; Hewitt said, that he had been kicked by police officers.

About 4:45 p.m., and from there on until about 6 p.m., ten voter registration workers in Canton were arrested, bringing the total, for about 24 hours, to fifteen. Alma Bosley, (CORE), Bobby Robinson, William Veal, Joe Lee Watts (CORE), Patricia Myers, Pete Hewitt, Richard Jewett (CORE), Milton Esco, Levi Jackson and Martha Jones were arrested, apparently for distributing leaflets without a permit (later confirmed by a telephone call from jail by Dick Jewett), according to Carol Merritt, the only staff member for COFO (and SNCC field secretary) still free in Canton. They were distributing leaflets and editions of the Mississippi Free Press.

~~Miss Merritt~~ also revealed that the COFO office and community center had been condemned, and the police were not permitting them to enter the building.

A telegram to the Justice Department was dispatched by Dave Dennis, Assistant Project Director for the Council of Federated Organizations and a CORE Field Secretary, early in the day protesting the arrests of James Collier and Clarence Chinn, and another later in the day with the longer accumulation of

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grievances. The second telegram protested the arrests, demanded an investigation of ~~the~~ the new city ordinance banning the distribution of handbills in Canton, and ~~demanded~~ federal protection of the citizens of Canton. The telegram further protested the condemnation of the voter-registration headquarters, the maltreatment of the prisoners arrested earlier, and the refusal of city authorities to divulge the names, charges and amount of bond to COFO and ~~press~~ press queries (UPI and AP made inquiries; the jail authorities were equally rude to all.). The telegram called for immediate, unconditional release of the arrested workers (text appended).

January 24, 1964 (Friday)

Henry Lee Chinn, son of C.O. Chinn, was arrested for reasons unknown. He was just ~~was~~ walking in town, and the authorities have refused to divulge the charge. The charge was driving without a sticker, on a warrant issued by the Highway Patrol. George Washington was tried and found guilty of burning trash on the ~~nd~~ sidewalk. He appealed and posted bond.

The Freedom House and the office of the COFO staff members and the houses of all the local persons active in the movement were searched for liquor, but none was found. The office and community center was "de-condemned", however, for staff members were able to enter and use the telephone.

Bond was set at \$500.00 for all persons in jail.

Claude Weaver, of SNCC, and Mattheo Suarez, of CORE, went to Canton, to bolster the COFO staff representation in Canton. They and Marcellus Byrd of Canton, are the only staff members now in the area and out of jail.

Carol Merritt, of SNCC, was arrested at about 9:00 p.m. She was charged with contributing to the delinquency of a juvenile, apparently because some of the leafleters were underage.

Up to now, the most significant fact of the arrests in Canton is that with only four exceptions, the seventeen people arrested were from Canton.

Text of the telegrams sent to the Justice Department:

ROBERT KENNEDY, BURKE C. MARSHALL:

DEMAND IMMEDIATE INVESTIGATION BY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF UNCONSTITUTIONAL ARRESTS OF VOTER REGISTRATION WORKERS JAMES COLLIER AND CLARENCE CHINN IN CANTON, MISS., ARRESTED FOR DISTRIBUTING VOTER REGISTRATION WITHOUT A PERMIT, THIRD ARREST OF ~~THE~~ VOTER REGISTRATION WORKERS IN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS. (SIGNED) DAVID DENNIS

Second Telegram:

ROBERT KENNEDY, BURKE C. MARSHALL:

WE PROTEST UNCONSTITUTIONAL ARRESTS OF VOTER REGISTRATION WORKERS ALMA BOSLEY, RICHARD JEWETT, JOE LEE WATTS, PETE HEWITT, PATRICIA MYERS, MILTON ESCO, MARTHA JONES, LEVI JACKSON, IN CANTON, MISS., APPARENTLY ON CHARGES OF DISTRIBUTING HANDBILLS WITHOUT A PERMIT. FURTHER PROTEST HARRASSMENT, MALTREATMENT OF VOTER REGISTRATION WORKERS JAMES COLLIER, C.O. CHINN, THEODIS HEWITT ARRESTED AND HELD INCOMMUNICADO EARLIER TODAY, CONDEMNATION OF VOTER REGISTRATION OFFICES. DEMAND FEDERAL PROTECTION IMMEDIATELY, IMMEDIATE, UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE OF THESE INDIVIDUALS. (SIGNED) DAVID DENNIS, ASSISTANT PROJECT DIRECTOR, C.O.F.O.

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**Final list of those arrested: (9 p.m., January 24)**

**George Washington, about 40, Canton, Miss.; burning trash on the sidewalk**  
**C.O. Chinn, age 42, Canton; disturbing the peace of the general public (CORE)**  
**Clarence Chinn, about 40, Canton; violation of the building code**  
**Theodis Hewitt, age 25, Canton; intimidating an officer and disturbing the**  
**peace of the general public (CORE)**  
**James Collier, age 28, Jackson, Miss.; violation of the building code (SNCC)**  
**Alma Bosley, age 21, Plaquemine, La.; distributing handbills without a permit**  
**(CORE)**  
**Joe Lee Watts, age 20, Canton, distributing handbills (CORE)**  
**Patricia Myers, age 18, Canton, distributing handbills**  
**Pete Hewitt, age 17, Canton; distributing handbills without a permit**  
**Richard Jewett, age 30, New York City; distributing handbills (CORE)**  
**Milton Esco, age 17, Canton; distributing handbills**  
**Bobby Robinson, age 19, Canton; distributing handbills**  
**William Veal, age 18, Canton; distributing handbills**  
**Levi Jackson, age 15, Canton; distributing handbills**  
**Martha Jones, age 21, Canton; distributing handbills**  
**Henry Lee Chinn, age 23, Canton; traffic charge**  
**Carol Merritt, age 23, Cincinnati, Ohio; contributing to the delinquency of**  
**a juvenile (SNCC)**  
**total: 17**

**The list above shows names, ages, home town and of those arrested. The initials in parentheses indicate full-time COFO staff members, and their organizational affiliation, either the Congress of Racial Equality or the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.**