

UNIT VII, Part 2: Mississippi Politics and COFO's Political Program  
in Mississippi

(Presented in question and answer form under topical headings)

INTRODUCTION

I. COFO--The Organization

- A. What is COFO?
- B. What are the Programs sponsored by COFO?
- C. How Did COFO get started?

II. Mrs. Hamer's Campaign

- A. Who is Mrs. Hamer?
- B. Why is she running for office?
- C. What is Mrs. Hamer's Platform?
- D. Who is her opponent?
- E. How is the campaign to be conducted?
- F. Has she any chance of winning? If not, why challenge?

III. Other COFO Political Programs for the summer

- A. How will the Democratic Convention be challenged?
- B. What are the plans for the Freedom Registration?
- C. The Freedom Candidates?

IV. Voting in Mississippi

- A. How is the state Democratic Party organized?
- B. What are the voting requirements?
- C. Who votes in Mississippi?
- D. What are the proofs of discrimination in voting?
- E. Why isn't the Negro allowed to vote? What does the white man fear?
- F. What steps have been taken to give Negroes the vote?

V. Historical Development of white, one-party politics

- A. What role did Reconstruction play?
- B. Who controls the votes and how?
- C. Why hasn't the Republican Party been stronger?
- D. What changes will occur when Negroes can vote?

## INTRODUCTION

The following will provide a background of information from which it is hoped the teacher in the Freedom School will be able to direct a discussion and set up a situation in which dialogue will be possible on the subject of politics and its relation to the individual and to groups--especially politics in Mississippi. As a part of this, the development of COFO, its aims and purposes as a political action group will also be discussed.

The approach that will be taking is to use the example of Mrs. Hamer's campaign for Representative to the U.S. House as a point of departure for discussion of the political situation in the state. It is hoped that through the use of a specific case study, the students may see the political structure as relevant and close to his own experience. That even more importantly, the students may be awakened to the essential role each individual plays in the democratic process, what this role is, and how to go about exercising his right to a voice in the decision making that concerns his life. Beyond this, by studying Mrs. Hamer's campaign and the broader aspects of COFO's political program for the summer and beyond, the student may see one example of how to combat the problems of discrimination that take his right away to have a voice in local, state and national government.

The basic concepts which it is important to get across from this unit are these: (1) Fundamentals of how the political structure is organized at local, state and national level. (2) How the individual participates in politics and why it is important. (3) How the political structure in Mississippi is organized to discriminate against the Negro and why. (4) What steps can and are being taken to correct existing conditions of discrimination.

### I. COFO

What is COFO?

COFO is the Council of Federated Organizations--a federation of all the national civil rights organizations active in Mississippi, local political and action groups and some fraternal and social organizations.

Why have such a federation of organizations?

To create unity and to give a sense of continuity to Civil Rights efforts in the state. Particularly since any civil rights program must be carried out in an atmosphere of extreme hostility from the white community, it was felt that unity through an organization of this kind would create a bond of support for Negroes all over the state. COFO also provides a sense of identity and purpose to local political action groups already existing and a means of exchanging ideas. One of its major purposes is to develop leadership in local communities all over the state. In the past people have belonged to Civil Rights organizations. COFO would like to be an organization which in a real sense belongs to the people. It is so structured that all decision making is done democratically and directly by all the groups working together--allowing each individual the right of voicing his opinion and making his vote count.

Decisions concerning COFO are made at its state wide convention meetings which are called when necessary. Anyone active under any of the organizations which make up membership are entitled to attend COFO conventions and participate in policy-making decisions of the organization.

The staff consists of anyone working full time with any civil rights organization in Mississippi. This staff carries out the decisions of the COFO convention and prepares recommendations for it's consideration. Below the state COFO convention there are district organizations corresponding to the five congressional districts. These district organizations are only in the planning stage at present. The staff is divided into congressional districts with five district directors; this organizational structure is functioning at present.

The state organization has four standing committees: Welfare and Relief, Political Action, Finance and Federal Programs. The district organizations have, or will have, similar standing committees. Dr. Aaron E. Henry of Clarksdale, State President of the NAACP, is President of the Council of Federated Organizations. Robert Moses, Field Secretary and Mississippi Project Director for SNCC, is the Program Director, who supervises the Mississippi staff and is elected by it. David Dennis, Mississippi Field Secretary for CORE, is Assistant Program Director, and is similarly elected.

What are the programs sponsored by COFO?

COFO works in two major areas. (1) Political (2) Educational and social.

The educational and social programs are the Freedom Schools, Federal Programs, Literacy, Work-study, Food and Clothing and Community Centers. Some of these are in operation; others are in the process of being developed.

Freedom Schools are planned for the summer of 1964. There are several things which hopefully will be accomplished by the Schools. (1) to provide remedial instruction in basic educational skills but more importantly (2) to implant habits of free thinking and ideas of how a free society works, and (3) to lay the groundwork for a statewide youth movement.

Federal Programs Project is to make the programs of the Federal government which are designed to alleviate poverty and ignorance reach the people of Mississippi. The federal programs include the Area Redevelopment Act, the Manpower Development and Training Act, the bureaus of the Farmers Home Administration and the Office of Manpower, Automation and Training. You may ask why it is necessary for COFO to be concerned about the administration of federal programs, which are by definition, desegregated and anti-discriminatory. As things now stand the normal channel of information--the state agencies--do not properly present these programs. The State of Mississippi is not reconciled to the desegregated nature of these programs, so Negroes are not allowed to participate. Because of this, private agencies, such as COFO must act as liason between the federal programs and the people they are designed to help.

The Literacy Project at Tougaloo College is a research project under the direction of John Diebold and Associates Company, and is financed by an anonymous grant to the college. The goal of the project is to write self-instructional materials which will teach adult illiterates in lower social and economic groups to read and write.

The Work-Study Project is an attempt to solve the pressing staff problems in the Southern Movement--the conflict between full-time civil rights work and school for the college age worker. Under the work-study program, students spend a year in full-time field work for SNCC, under the direction of COFO field staff, and with special academic work designed to complement their field work and keep them familiar with learning and intellectual discipline. After this year of field work, they get a full scholarship to Tougaloo College for one year.

Food, Clothing and Shelter Programs is a privately financed distribution program of the necessities of life for persons whose needs are so basic that they cannot feed their families one meal a day per person. This welfare services aspect of COFO grew partly out of a need to provide for families who are leaving the plantations sometimes because of automation and sometimes because of their activities in voter registration projects, particularly in the Delta.

The food intake of most poor rural Mississippians is at some times sufficient. These times are usually (1) when they receive government commodities, (2) when the tenant or low-income farmer receives money from his cotton and other minor crops, usually in early and mid-fall, and (3) when landlords give credit to tenant families usually from late March to July. The rest of the time the poor rural families and the unemployed often go hungry.

The clothing situation of both the urban and rural poor is desperate. But the problem is not as difficult in summer months, when the weather is warm, as it is in winter when the children must have warm clothes to go to school.

Many people in the deep South live in housing unfit for human habitation. In Mississippi over 50% of the rural occupied farm housing is classified as deteriorated or dilapidated. More than 50% of the rural homes in Mississippi have no piped water and more than 75% have no flush toilets, bathtubs or showers. COFO hopes to begin a program of home repair workshops and volunteer youth corps assisting people to repair their homes, all working out of a community center.

The Community Centers is to be a network of community centers across the state. It is conceived as a long-range institution. The centers will provide a structure for a sweeping range of recreational and educational programs. In doing this, they will not only serve basic needs of Negro communities now ignored by the state's political structure, but will form a dynamic focus for the development of community organization.

How did COFO get started?

COFO has evolved through three phases in its short history. The first phase of the organization was little more than an ad hoc committee called together after the Freedom Rides of 1961 in an effort to have a meeting with Governor Ross Barnett. This committee of Mississippi civil rights leaders proved a convenient vehicle for channeling the voter registration program of the Voter Education Project, a part of the Southern Regional Council, into Mississippi.

With the funds of the Voter Education Project, COFO went into a second phase. This period beginning in February 1962, COFO became an umbrella for voter registration drives in the Mississippi Delta and other isolated cities in Mississippi. At this time COFO added a small full-time staff, mostly SNCC and a few CORE workers, and developed a voter registration program. The staff worked with local NAACP leaders and SCLC citizenship teachers in an effort to give the Mississippi Negroes the broadest possible support. COFO continued essentially as a committee with a staff and a program until the fall of 1963.

The emergence of the Ruleville Citizenship group, and the Holmes County Voters League, testified to the possibility of starting strong local groups. It was felt that COFO could be the organization through which horizontal ties could develop among these groups, with the strongest common denominator possible within the general aims of the Civil Rights Movement. Every effort was made during this time to put across county and organizational lines and have people from different areas meet with each other, to sponsor county, regional and state-wide meetings, to bring

students together from different parts of the state for workshops, to help send groups outside of the state to meetings, conferences, workshops and SCLC citizenship schools. During this second phase we began to feel more and more that the "Committee could be based in a network of local adult groups sprung from the Movement as we worked the state.

The third phase representing the present functioning of the organization began in the fall of 1963 with the Freedom Vote for Governor. This marked the first state wide effort and coincided with the establishment of a state wide office in Jackson and a trunk line to reach into the Mississippi Delta and hill country. The staff has broadened to include more CORE and SNCC workers and more citizenship schools.

Plans for the fourth phase of the organization would include a budget or funds for program and staff on a long term basis, worked out with the major civil rights groups and other interested organizations and individuals across the country. The aim would be to organize every Negro community in Mississippi to train local people to help lead Mississippi through the next difficult years of transition.

## II. Mrs. Hamer's Campaign for Congress (2nd Congressional District)

Who is Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer?

Mrs. Hamer is one of the four candidates running political office this summer in Mississippi. She is challenging Mr. Jamie Whitten for the seat of U. S. Representative in the Second Congressional District. Mr. Whitten is a powerful man in the House of Representatives, holding the position of Chairman of the House Appropriations Sub-Committee on Agriculture. Since the Second Congressional District is the heart of cotton-growing Delta where Negroes outnumber whites in most of the counties, what Mr. Whitten does as chairman of this committee has direct bearing on both Negro and White populations. So far Mr. Whitten's actions have reflected a decidedly racist bias--so that he is not representing all the people of the Second Congressional District, but those white, landholders who control the majority of the wealth in the Delta.

One of the most blatant examples of this bias on Whitten's part was a bill before the Sub-Committee on Agriculture to train 2400 men to drive tractors. The bill was killed. Why kill a bill which obviously would benefit the state by attacking the problems of automation? The answer becomes clear when we realize that (1) Under the Manpower Retraining Act, all projects must be integrated. (2) The majority of those to be trained were Negro (600 whites).

Why is Mrs. Hamer running for office?

Mrs. Hamer is the mother of several children and besides that, a woman, which is very unusual for Mississippi politics. It is certainly partially because she is a mother and concerned about the future of her children that she is running.. However, the real answer to this question can only be found in Mrs. Hamer's history and the experiences she has had as a native Mississippian. Mrs. Hamer who is 47, comes from Ruleville, Mississippi in Sunflower County. This is cotton growing country--large plantations (of sometimes hundreds and thousands of acres of land), small towns, the Company Store, the sheriff whose job it is to "control the niggers" and not see the bootleg whiskey being sold--the home of Senator James O. Eastland.

Until 1962, the Hamers had lived for 16 years on a plantation four miles from Ruleville. On August 31, 1962, Mrs. Hamer tried to register to vote--the same day she and her husband were told they would have to leave the plantation immediately

← by the owner. His comment to Mrs. Hamer was "What are you trying to do to me". A Negro does not act independently of his "Owner". This revealing comment illustrates how inextricably the Negroes' destiny has been linked to the land and its owner. A system from which all the legal restriction of slavery have been removed but which has remained frozen in place. It is only now changing because of the forces of change all around it. Mrs. Hamer's action represents the new attitude of emancipation on the part of the Negro. An attitude which has come slowly to the feudal-like system of the Delta, where the symbiotic relationship of white and black has perhaps been more intense than anywhere else. The slowness with which change has come to the Delta is in direct relationship to the amount of opposition expressed by the white people there.

Mrs. Hamer began working with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in December 1962 and has been one of the most active workers in the state on Voter Registration. Because of her activities she has received much abuse from white people in the Ruleville community--people shoot into her home, threaten her life. In 1963 she was arrested in Winona, Mississippi, held in jail overnight for no reason and severely beaten with a blackjack. She still suffers from this incident.

Mrs. Hamer feels very strongly that Negroes are not being represented in either state or national government and this forms the basis for her willingness to run for office even in the face of tremendous danger to herself personally. Mrs. Hamer tells her audiences that she is only saying "what you have been thinking all along." But Mrs. Hamer plans to direct her campaign to whites as well as Negroes. It is her feeling that all Mississippians, white and Negro alike, are victims of the all-white, one-party power structure of the state. The major emphasis of Mrs. Hamer's campaign however, will be voting rights for the Negro. Her platform, like that of the other three candidates, includes a discussion of issues that reach beyond the problems within the state of poverty, automation, education and equal representation and touches on national domestic issues as well as international policy.

It is a comment on the conservative reaction the state has shown in the past ten years, that Representative Frank Smith was defeated in the 1962 elections. Although not outspokenly liberal about voting rights for the Negro, Smith was concerned for all the people of the Delta and had some idea of the problems the region faces in the future as automation takes away the jobs of many people. Recently he made a statement in support of the Civil Rights bill now before the Congress. The two or three rational men of some vision in the Mississippi Legislature have all been voted out of office in the last four years. It is necessary that Mrs. Hamer and people like her come forward to fill this gap.

How will Mrs. Hamer conduct her campaign?

Mrs. Hamer is entered in the regular Democratic primary in Mississippi to be held June 2, 1964. She is running on what is to be called the FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY. If defeated in the Democratic party, she will be able to continue her campaign as an Independent in the General Election in November.

Has she any chance of winning? If not, why challenge?

The chances of Mrs. Hamer actually becoming the Representative to the House at this time are of course almost impossible. But since the campaign, as well as the campaigns of the other three candidates has a two-fold purpose--the chances of winning, the goals they seek are very good. One of the purposes is to encourage Negroes not now registered to vote to register by means of the "Freedom Registration" to be conducted this summer. The second purpose is to let the State of Mississippi and the nation become aware that change is taking place in Mississippi and that the rights

of the Negro must be realized, if Democracy is to work in a state like Mississippi.

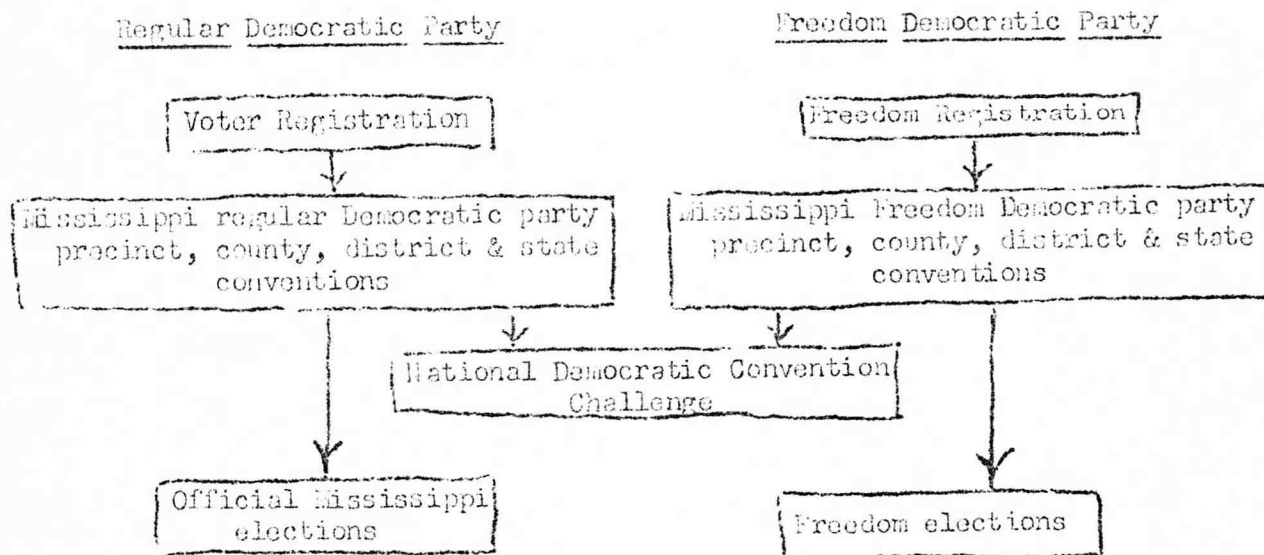
### III. Other Aspects of the COFO Political Program for the Summer

How will the Democratic Convention be challenged?

The focus of political activity during the spring and summer will be an attempt to unseat the regular Mississippi Delegation to the National Democratic Convention at Atlantic City, New Jersey, in August of this year.

Mississippi does not allow many people, particularly Negroes, to participate in political affairs in meaningful numbers. For this reason COFO claims that the Mississippi delegation to the Convention does not represent all the people of Mississippi and should not be seated. An attempt is being made to contact delegations from other states to have them vote against seating the regular Mississippi delegation. It is not known whether this challenge will be successful.

Two groups of delegates will attempt to be seated at the Convention--the regular Democratic delegation and the so-called Freedom Democratic Delegation. This means that COFO is organizing (1) those people who are now registered voters in Mississippi and (2) those who have tried to register and have not been allowed to vote. From each of these groups a delegation will be chosen to go to the National Convention.



Note: Any registered voter can take part in both columns.

Regular Democratic Party -- The Democratic Party in Mississippi every four years holds a series of convention to select delegates to the National Democratic National Convention. The conventions are held in years of a national election; 1964 is such a year.

COFO's plan is for as many Negro registered voters to attempt to attend precinct meetings as possible and if allowed to participate, to use their influence to get

Negro representatives elected to attend the County Conventions. In other words, the attempt will be to have Negroes participating in the regularly prescribed manner in every stage of the political process from precinct meeting, to County Convention, district convention and state convention. The possibilities of Negroes actually being allowed to participate is slim but it is important that the effort be made to go through the normal channels as an educational process for Negroes who have never had the opportunity of doing it before and also as an indication of serious intent to the white political structure.

Freedom Democratic Party -- Because the state officials have refused to register so many people in Mississippi, COFO is running a parallel registration procedure called Freedom Registration. Freedom Registration will take place under a Freedom Registrar--one in each of the counties in the state. The Freedom Registration is a simplified registration form with no literacy or interpretive requirements. Any U.S. citizen who is a resident of Mississippi can be Freedom registered. The anticipated goal for Freedom Registration is 300,000 to 400,000 people.

It is these two delegations--from the regular Democratic party and from the Freedom Democratic party which will attempt to be seated as the delegates to the National Democratic Convention. The challenge of the Freedom Democratic party at the National Convention is one attempt to win truly representative government for all the people in Mississippi.

In addition to the campaign being conducted by Mrs. Hamer in the Second Congressional District, there are three other Freedom Candidates. They are Mr. James M. Houston of Vicksburg, Representative of the third Congressional District; Reverend Jone E. Cameron of Hattiesburg, Fifth Congressional District and Mrs. Victoria Jo Gray of Hattiesburg, Senate against Senator John Stennis.

The Freedom Candidates are running on generally the same platform. The platform was drawn up by the COFO Convention. Each of the candidates, of course, will vary in terms of the issues they discuss in the campaign. The platform drawn up by COFO touches on issues of foreign and domestic policy as well as local problems. On the issues of disarmament, the United Nations, foreign aid; the platform emphasises our working directly for a peaceful world by urging further steps toward curtailing bomb testing. It recognizes that only through responsible involvement in the U.N. and foreign aid programs can the U.S. contribute to a peaceful world. It strongly urges passage of the Civil Rights bill now. On domestic issues at the National level it urges and supports the anti-poverty program of President Johnson, recognizing that poverty ~~is~~ one of America's most pressing problems. In addition, it supports medicare, federally supported education programs, particular job retraining programs; further development of the nation's poverty-stricken rural areas; urban renewal programs in Mississippi, which have been curtailed by the Mississippi House of Representatives during this session of the Legislature.

In the November elections this fall all Freedom registered voters and regularly registered voters will be eligible to vote in the Freedom election. This election will have a ballot which will include Freedom candidates as well as the regular candidates. The election will again show that people wishing to take part in Mississippi political affairs are prevented from doing so by existing restrictions.

The COFO political program is designed to fill two roles: (1) Challenge the existing political structure in Mississippi and show how it discriminates against the Negro. (2) Educate the Negro politically; get the Negro thinking about specific ways of acting to improve Mississippi and his position in the state and to train people for future positions of leadership in the state.

#### ← IV. Voting in Mississippi

How is the Democratic Party organized in the State?

The precinct is the smallest political unit. It is usually a part of a supervisors' district (called a "beat"). Each county has five beats. Since there are usually two or three precinct to a supervisors' district, there are at least ten to fifteen precincts in a county. Some counties have many more precincts, other counties have fewer precincts. There are about 1800 precincts in the state.

The precinct convention is the only convention open to all voters in an area. These conventions are usually poorly attended. This is an indication of the apathy on the part of voters in the state—apathy which allows a frightening amount of power to be in the hands of a very few men who make most of the decisions. Negroes, since Reconstruction have not been a part of this process at all, even those who are registered to vote. At the precinct convention delegates to the county convention are chosen. The number of delegates is decided earlier by the County Democratic Executive Committee; usually from one to six delegates are chosen. Usually there are alternate delegates chosen for each of the elected delegates, thus doubling the size of the delegation. The precinct convention is run by majority vote and by rules decided by majority vote.

CCFO challenged the precinct meetings in about fifteen or twenty precincts by having both registered and unregistered Negroes attempt to attend the meetings. This is to form the basis for the national challenge and therefore is most important. After the challenge the duplicate Freedom Democratic precinct meetings were held to parallel the regular Democratic meetings.

The county convention meets at least one week after the precinct conventions and is attended by elected delegates from the precincts of the eighty two counties of the state. The county convention selects delegates to the district and state conventions. Each county elects delegates equal to twice the number of representatives that county has in the Mississippi House of Representatives. Many times each vote is split in half, so twice as many delegates are elected, and an alternate is then elected for each half vote delegate. The county convention also elects the County Democratic Executive Committee which has fifteen members. This committee appoints poll watchers, counts votes, and is the county political body.

The district conventions are held at least a week after the county conventions. There are five district conventions—one for each congressional district. At the district convention six delegates, each with half a vote, are chosen to go to the National Democratic Convention. Three alternate delegates are also chosen. The National Democratic Convention is where the selection of the Democratic candidate for President is made. Three members of the State Democratic Executive Committee are chosen at the convention. One candidate for Democratic Presidential elector is chosen.

At the state convention held at least a week after the last of the district conventions, the rest of the delegates to the National Democratic Convention are chosen. Mississippi has 24 votes at the National Democratic Convention. The state convention also elects the National Democratic Committeeman and the National Democratic Committeewoman. These two people sit on the Democratic National Committee; this is the committee in charge of policy for the party between conventions. The State Democratic Executive Committee is the policy body for the Democratic party throughout the state.

Since traditionally there has not been a strong Republican party in the state, the Primary for all practical purposes indicates the results of the election. Until the 1963 Gubernatorial election, when a Republican for the first time really offered opposition, people tended to vote in the Primary and not in the general election. This monolithic structure has offered very little atmosphere for ~~a~~real debate. There is some hope that the favorable showing of the Republicans (even though Goldwater conservative in nature) will offer at least an interchange of ideas for the future.

#### Who Votes in Mississippi?

There are no statistics available on whites registered to vote. Even the information available on Negro voting is incomplete since it comes from only 69 of the eighty two counties in the state. In these counties Negroes constitute 37.7 per cent of the adult population but only 6.2 per cent are registered to vote. In 13 of the 69 counties there are no registered Negro voters.

It is no accident that information on voting is hard to obtain or that only 25,000 Negroes are registered. As anywhere else, part of the problem is apathy. But in Mississippi even apathy is different. It is born not so much of disinterest as a feeling of utter frustration and futility passed from generation to generation. For instance in Holmes County where Negroes are three fourths of the population, there are no Negro voters. Two or three have been trying to register every day since July, 1963. The registrar has said flatly that he will allow Negroes to take the test but that he has no intention of passing them. It is this kind of frustration which the Negro is faced with for even attempting to exercise the most basic of democratic rights in Mississippi.

#### What are the proofs of discrimination in voting?

The whole pattern of voting requirements and of the registration form is calculated to make the process appear to the voter to be hopeless. The process is a complicated one which culminates in the would-be voter's name being published in the paper. Why publish a prospective voter's name in the paper--like announcing his marriage or the birth of a child? The major purpose is to overwhelm the voter so that he is afraid to even attempt to register. Behind this approach is supposed to be--and all too often is--a collection of fears that someone will challenge voter's moral character, that he may be prosecuted for perjury. This is not an altogether unfounded fear as illustrated by the fact that one man who attempted to register was accused of being morally unfit to be a voter because he and his wife were not legally married but had been living in a common law relationship for over twenty years. In addition, publishing a prospective voter's name announces his intention to his employer, landlord and anyone else who might retaliate with violence.

It is difficult to prove on the face of it, that the voting laws in Mississippi are purposefully discriminatory, since they apply equally to white and black. However, it is ~~a~~comparison with other states--particularly those outside the deep south that the whole procedure becomes suspect. It is much less difficult to see how discrimination works at the level of the individual Negro who attempts to register. There are many evidences of brutality, economic and physical retaliation. An illustration of physical retaliation is the case of the three Negro men who went to Rankin County Courthouse to register. As one man was filling in the form, the County Sheriff came in and began questioning him. When the man told him he was registering to vote, the sheriff began beating him on the head with a blackjack and forced him out of the office. This was the result of individuals deciding on their own to register--not a planned registration campaign which had aroused feelings against Negroes.

We do have clear evidence however, that the intent of the voting laws passed by the legislature in 1955 and 1962 was discrimination against Negro voters. Public officials at that time carefully avoided making statements which could be used in court actions as proof of intention to discriminate. However, Governor White stated in 1954 that the constitutional amendments proposed (and passed in 1955) would "tend to maintain segregation." In 1962 a representative urged the legislators not to take up unnecessary questions regarding the legislation in public. So there was no real debate on the floor of the house. In recent times this policy has been strictly adhered to on any legislation affecting race in the state legislature. The comments of a legislature, who was very conscience of the power of the Citizens Council, give us an indication of how restricted the lawmakers are to differ:

It's hard for us sometimes to consider a bill on its merits if there is any way Bill Simmons (executive secretary of the Citizens Council) can attach an integration tag. For instance, a resolution was introduced in the House to urge a boycott of Memphis stores because some of them have desegregated. I knew it was ridiculous and would merely amuse North Mississippians who habitually shop in Memphis. The resolution came in the same week that four Negroes were fined in court for boycotting Clarksdale stores. Yet the hot eyes of Bill Simmons were watching. If we voted against the resolution he would have branded us. So there we were, approving a boycott while a Mississippi court was convicting Negroes for doing what we lawmakers were advocating. It just didn't make sense.

In October, 1954 the Jackson Daily News editorialized on statements made by Robert Patterson, Head of the Citizens Council about the legislation. The headline read "The amendment is intended solely to limit Negro registration." The Jackson-Times (a now defunct newspaper) reported "This proposed amendment is not aimed at keeping white people from voting, no matter how morally corrupt they may be. It is an ill-disguised attempt to keep qualified Negroes from voting; and as such; it should not have the support of the people of Mississippi." This advice was not heeded however and the legislation was passed.

The registration form itself is not too difficult in terms of it's demands on the person's literacy. There are however, numerous factual questions which the registrant must answer such as his precinct. The attempt to make the application appear difficult begins with it's title "SWORN Written Application for Registration" There are included a series of potentially confusing questions which ask about the registrants occupation, business and employment. The numerous small questions which make up this part of the form are obviously not all necessary and could be answered by fewer questions. They why have them? Because they provide more opportunity for error on the part of the person registering.

The voter test is an exam in which the registrant must be able to write and interpret a section of the Mississippi Constitution. A Yale law graduate states that ~~that~~ "There are some 285 sections of the state constitution, and the document is one of the most complex and confusing in the nation". The examiner points to a section and tells the applicant to copy and interpret it. On the tester's cognizance, you pass or fail. He has absolute power. His decision is not reviewable, and there are no standards by which it can be judged in court.

The above information gives us the background of discrimination in voting in the state and some specifics of how the Registrar misuses the registration form to keep Negroes from voting. There are however, other proofs of discrimination—incident after incident of people who have been turned away from the Circuit Clerk's office without being allowed to register; people who have been shot at, lost their jobs or otherwise have been intimidated for attempting to vote. It has always been

made clear to the Negro by his white employer, landlord or acquaintance that he is not to attempt to vote--this is the most present kind of proof of discrimination.

Why isn't the Negro allowed to vote? What does the white man fear?

In Mississippi where the Negro represents 42 per cent of the population, perhaps the numerical reason is the most over-powering answer as to why the Negro is not allowed to vote and why the white man is so afraid. The intensity of white reaction is in direct proportion to the numbers of Negroes in a given county or area. For instance in the gulf counties and the extreme northern hill counties where there is not as large a percentage of Negroes, opposition by whites to voting is less violent. While in the Delta counties, southern counties and the river counties, with a few exceptions, opposition is sudden, violent and explosive when Negroes attempt to register to vote in large numbers or individually. It is often the individual Negro who deviates from "his place" which frightens the white man the most. What was known and safe suddenly becomes unknown and uncontrollable. Retaliation to individuals is often death, as in the case of Herbert Lee in Amite County. Mr. Lee tried to register and encouraged others to register--for this he was shot down by a state legislator. When Negroes register in large numbers because of a voter drive, the white man can blame "outsiders" and "agitators" for stirring up things.

In essence then the reasons Negroes are not allowed to vote and the things the white man fears are inextricably part of the same cloth. The white man fears a "Negro take-over"--block voting, Negroes controlling the state--these are the surface things. Underneath this are the sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious fears about himself--the guilt for an enslaving system which makes a man less than human because of the color of his skin. All of this gets translated into myths about the Negroes' inferiority, dirtiness, ignorance, violence. These myths in turn justify the system. For those people who can see beyond the myths, who either for moral or economic reasons would like to see the segregated pattern of southern life change, there is the White Citizens Council. The Council has a great deal of control of the political structure but even more than that is a "big brother" looking over the shoulder of anyone who wants to step out of line.

Perhaps some quotations from Council literature can say it better. "If the Negro was permitted to obtain the ballot...it would mean that no qualified white man...could every hold public office (and) seats now held by competent white representatives would be held by ignorant, incompetent Negroes"; "There is a vast gulf between the IQ of the Negro... and the average white man because of an inherent deficiency in mental ability, psychological and temperamental inadequacies, of indifference and natural indolence on the part of the Negro"; "If segregation breaks down, the social structure breaks down...The Communists hope to achieve disintegration through integration in America"; "Integration represents darkness, regimentation, totalitarianism, Communism and destruction...Segregation represents the freedom to choose one's associates, Americanism, state sovereignty and the survival of the white race"; "The enemy cloaked in the mysterious name of 'integration' is hysterically assaulting the natural order, the created order in nature, the legal order under God, and above all else, the free grace of Jesus Christ".

What steps have been taken to give the Negroes the vote?

The first concerted efforts to get Negroes registered in Mississippi began in 1961 when Bob Moses, moving into Greenwood, Mississippi started a program to educate and encourage local people to participate in political activity. This project was sponsored by the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council. As has

already been discussed, the beginnings of COFO came from this effort. The focus of COFO has been largely on political action. Because obtaining the individuals right to vote is the key to full participation in the democratic process through which hopefully, a deeper kind of change can come. Until 1963 much time was spent simply in becoming known in local communities and establishing the basis of a political organization which could act with united effort. The past year has seen several new attempts at education and mass registration.

The Mock campaign for Governor was one such attempt. By focussing on the Campaign with Freedom Candidates, COFO was able to garner 80-90,000 votes and in the process educate this many people to the process of voting and the importance of political participation.

Freedom Days have also been planned in several communities this past spring. Most notable are the ones in Hattiesbur and Canton, Mississippi. These are Voter Drives sponsored by COFO to get as many people in the community registered to vote. In both places a day or several days were set to get as many people as possible to go down to register. It was necessary to picket the courthouse in both Canton and Hattiesburg because of the obvious policy of discrimination on the part of the Registrar. In Canton only two or three people a day have been allowed to take the test at all. Picketing has been allowed by the local officials which in itself is an innovation in Mississippi where people have never been allowed to picket over five minutes without being arrested. The National Council of Churches has cooperated in this project by sending teams of northern ministers to each city to act as observers and to be in a negotiating role with city officials and sympathetic whites. This has tended to keep down the violence but has not stopped arrests all together.

How successful has the Freedom Days been? They have not been successful in terms of numbers. For instance in Hattiesburg of about 500 attempts to register, about 150 people have actually been registered (and here the registrar is under federal court order not to discriminate). Other federal suits are being filed against Registrars to try to get them disqualified. This kind of counter-action may in time prove so harrassing to local registrars that they will improve, but is a lengthy and expensive process.

Since 1961 out of about 70,000 people who have reached by civil rights groups, only 6,000-7,000 have actually attempted to register and only 10 per cent of that number have actually gotten registered. This is very little success for a lot of time and effort spent.

But to understand the goals of COFO is trying to reach, we must look at things other than numbers. The amount of education and political awareness among Negroes has been incalculable. The feeling that at last there is something they as individuals can do to better themselves and their lot in Mississippi has been created. Once this spirit has been aroused, change has already begun to take place. In a real sense, the Freedom School is attempting to spread this spirit to students who can gain from this a new sense of their own identity and importance as people.

The second thing that has been accomplished is that the white Mississippian can no longer believe the myth that the Negro is "happy"; he too is aware there is change in the air. This means that one segment of the white population is becoming resigned to change; another is beginning to feel it can do what it has wanted to do all along—help bring about change; and the other feels backed into a corner and is becoming vicious.

The third aspect of the effects of political activity is that the rest of the nation has before it constantly the stark reality of the disenfranchised Negro in Mississippi. It makes it a little more difficult for James O. Eastland in Washington to talk about "gradual change" and States Rights as an excuse for segregation, when Negroes are being denied their basic right of the vote in Mississippi.

#### V. Historical Development of white, one-party politics

What role did Reconstruction Play?

"The striking parallel between people and events of the 1850's and the 1950's reminds us that Mississippi has been on the defensive against inevitable social change for more than a century and that for some years before the Civil War it had developed a closed society with an orthodoxy accepted by nearly everyone in the state. The all pervading doctrine then and now has been white supremacy."

Dr. James Silver, "Mississippi--the Closed Society"

Dr. Silver, History Professor at the University of Mississippi, points out a truth that far too few people are aware of or want to recognize. And that is that the South has always, for all practical purposes, gone its' own way, politically and otherwise. People from outside the Southern states have always been prone to view the "Old South" as a more backward section of the United States--but very definitely a part of the same heritage. It would be a mistake to say that slavery had its' influence on the politics of Mississippi but so did the influx of immigrants to ~~Boston~~ New England. This is to reduce the problem to the too-simple answer of sectional politics.

The white southerner if asked to explain his "way of life" to the outsider oftne harks back to Reconstruction to answer for the South's sectionalism, one party politics and segregation. It is as much a mistake to take this answer at face value as it is to see the white southerner only as a bigot and a racist. There is no doubt that Reconstruction was a difficult time for both the white southerner whose rights, temporarily, had been suspended and for the newly freed slave who had to adjust himself to freedom. The aftermath of war is the price that must be paid for waging war.

C. Van Woodward in "Reunion and Reaction" points out that the South had by 1877 regained control of its own destiny and proceeded between then and 1890 to re-establish segregation by means of enacting segregation laws and making the new battle cry "states rights". An important of this control was keeping the Negro from voting

He further states that democracy in American had always operated through compromise. The period of civil war and Reconstruction represent the only time when principle became the prime motivation for political action. For the ten years following the end of the war the South remained true to its principles and so did the North. However, with the secret compromise of 1877 between southern politicians and northern Republicans, the pattern of compromise and political expediency was re-established. This compromise represents the beginning of the coalition between the South and those northern Republicans who espouse the causes of states rights and business interests. It is this coalition which in part makes the South the powerful force it is in the legislature.

The compromise of 1877 over the election of Hayes and Tilden essentially was that the South would allow Hayes to win the election in exchange for the three remaining states then under federal occupation being returned to local control.

Prior to the Civil War the South had been as divided in political loyalty as other sections of the country. It was after the war that the Southern Whigs, unable to tolerate the Northern wing of the party because of their concern with equal rights for Negroes, resignedly settled into the Democratic party. Many of these so-called conservative democrats still basically held the same views that led them to vote for Henry Clays' nationalistic and capitalistic protective tariff and national bank.

After this party shift Woodward says "a thick miasma settled down over the political scene in the South. Under the fog of the one-party system one white man was virtually indistinguishable from another in his politics."

Who controls the vote?

Most obviously white people control the vote, leaving the Negro without representation, except as they see fit to represent him. However, traditionally the one-party system has continued based on a lack of dialogue. This control has had to be tight and monolithic. Ralph McGill talks about "the small town rich man" as the source of political as well as economic power in the small towns of the rural South. This is not just the plantation owner of the cotton growing areas, but the man in each small town who owns the gin and the main store, the cotton warehouse, the lumber mill. He lives in the largest house in the town, has his finger in everything that goes on in the town and rules with an iron hand. He makes a contribution at campaign time and always to the right man, and if in doubt, to both candidates. He has a hand in political patronage in his county. He "advises" or selects, the men who run for the legislature.

Since the time of the depression in the 1930's this pattern has been gradually changing. It has remained longest perhaps in Mississippi where change has come slowest and most painfully. This kind of small town demagogue can still be found in Mississippi but his influence is being displaced by industrial interests and as the states economy becomes more diversified.

Why hasn't the Republican Party been stronger?

It has been to the advantage of the deep south to remain monolithic. It has been able to have more influence this way, at a national level. On the whole few people have participated in politics and have been willing to let a few people make the decisions for them. However, in the recent Gubernatorial campaign, for the first time, the Republican Party made a strong showing. Not nearly enough to win the election, only 34 per cent of the vote. But this represents a crack in the wall of the one-party system. The legislation before the Mississippi legislature indicates how threatening this showing was to the political power structure in the state. The legislation, if passed, would virtually outlaw the Republican Party in the state. In an analysis of the election returns, Dr. Gordon Henderson of Millsaps College, stated that the majority of the Republican voters seemed to be urban, young, educated and of the middle-class. Their political views seemed to be conservative. And indeed the Republican candidate offered little hope to the Negroes of Mississippi. What it does offer is a chance for dialogue. However, there is hope for the future, if a two party system does develop, the Negro's vote will certainly be in demand.

What changes will occur in the state when Negroes can vote?

Most important, it will give the Negro a chance to voice his opinion in how his children should be educated, how his town is to be run, in short to decide

for himself those things which in the past have either been neglected or done for him. In terms of what changes will occur on the state scene, when Negroes have the opportunity to use their vote, it is likely to have a liberalizing influence. Many kinds of social legislation which have previously been defeated or kept out of the state such as federal job retraining programs, urban renewal projects, stronger welfare policy, etc., will have a chance of being passed. It means an opportunity for Negroes to hold public office and to begin to work at other than menial tasks.

Certainly, obtaining the vote alone is not going to create the "good society" in Mississippi. There has to also be a beginning of understanding and acceptance of each other, if the Negro is to obtain his human as well as his civil rights. In the long run one is useless without the other. But obtaining the vote has the potential for unlocking a number of doors that have been closed to the Negro in Mississippi and is absolutely essential if a democratic form of government is to work in the state.