

Natchez Political Handbook

By Alexander Shimkin

QUITE A LOT OF PEOPLE HAVE REGISTERED TO VOTE. NOW WE MUST KNOW HOW TO BEST USE THOSE BALLOTS. WE ALSO MUST BE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICS AT ALL LEVELS. LET US TAKE A LOOK AT THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE THAT AFFECTS US.

The Federal Government and Mississippi

The federal government is important in several ways:

1. Congress provides almost all the funds for welfare services in the state.
2. The federal courts decide on most of the cases involving demonstrations (such as picketing and parading without a permit), school desegregation, and voting. They also decide how the state will be divided up for purposes of representation.
3. The Justice Department is supposed to bring the cases to the federal courts whenever federal laws are involved. The Federal Bureau of Investigation is supposed to investigate crimes to see if civil rights are involved. The attorney general sends federal voter registrars into counties where he thinks they are needed.
4. The Office of Economic Opportunity manages the funds for the poverty program.



Over 75 per cent of the money the state gets for welfare programs like aid to dependent children and old age assistance comes from the federal government. The funds are given out by the U.S. Congress. School districts also receive federal funds, but first they must sign a compliance pledge which says they promise to desegregate their schools. Under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, school districts must sign these pledges to continue receiving money from the federal government. However, only token integration has followed these pledges in many places.

THE PEOPLE WHO REPRESENT MISSISSIPPI DON'T REPRESENT US!!!!!!

The U.S. Congress includes two Senators from Mississippi and five Congressmen. The two Senators are James O. Eastland and John C. Stennis. The city of Natchez is in the 3rd Congressional District, which also includes Jackson, McComb and Vicksburg. John Bell Williams is the Congressman from the 3rd district. He is an extreme conservative and segregationist and has opposed all welfare, poverty, labor and civil rights programs.

Williams has been in the House of Representatives since 1946 and has been very active in blocking HOME RULE for the District of Columbia-- which has a Negro majority. Thus by getting rid of him, Negroes in other parts of the country can also be freed. Next year Senator Eastland and Rep. Williams come up for re-election. BOTH ARE ENEMIES OF BLACK PEOPLE AND POOR PEOPLE AND SHOULD BE DEFEATED AND REPLACED BY GOOD CANDIDATES.

* * *

Judge Cox is the federal judge for the Southern District of Mississippi. He is very conservative and has only half-heartedly supported the law. The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in next above Judge Cox. Fortunately the judges on this court are much better. The president appoints judges to please the Senators. That is why J.P. Coleman, a former governor of Mississippi, was appointed to the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals this year although he is a segregationist.

But the federal courts have time and again (after people have been arrested) upheld the right of people to march two by two on the sidewalk, to picket, to hand out leaflets and so forth. Therefore it is clear that the various laws and ordinances forbidding this or saying that you must have a permit are no good and no attention should be paid to them--EVEN IF YOU HAVE TO GO TO JAIL TO GET THEM THROWN OUT.

* * *

The attorney general of the United States is Nicholas Katzenbach. He has been rather slow appointing federal registrars to Mississippi, although he did send a letter to all registrars saying that illiterate people should be registered. John Doar is head of the Civil Rights Division and Wiley Branton is in charge of voting rights. Under the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the attorney general has the power to send a federal registrar into a county to register people if he (the attorney general) receives 20 complaints and judges it necessary.

The State Government

The government of Mississippi is very old-fashioned and complicated. Therefore we will talk about only three officials, two agencies and the legislature.

The governor of Mississippi is Paul B. Johnson. He is a lawyer from Hattiesburg and was Ross Barnett's lieutenant governor. The governor is elected through the Democratic primary. However, the Republican Party has become much stronger and this may change. The first primary is held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in August every four years. The last election was in 1963 so the next one will be in 1967. If no candidate gets a majority in the first election, then a second primary is held three weeks later. The general election is held the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November and is just a courtesy vote.

GOVERNOR JOHNSON IS A RACIST WHO WAS ELECTED ON THE BASIS OF DEFIANCE OF FEDERAL AUTHORITY. LATELY HE HAS TRIED TO PROJECT A "MODERATE" LAW-ABIDING IMAGE WHILE DOING EVERYTHING IN HIS POWER TO KEEP NEGROES DOWN. The lieutenant governor is Carroll Gartin. The other important official is Joseph T. Patterson who is the attorney general. Patterson recently sent a letter to all county registrars telling them not to register illiterate people under the 1965 Mississippi voting legislation. He did this to keep Negroes from becoming registered voters.

* * *

The most important agency of the state is the Agriculture and Industry Board. Almost all the important industry in the state is owned by stockholders in the North. Therefore it is necessary to attract Northern companies by various schemes. The A. & I. Board is responsible for this. Local communities can issue bonds to build factories and lease them to Northern industry upon approval of the Board and the voters. THE BOARD HAS BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR MUCH OF THE ECONOMIC POLICY OF THE STATE, WHICH IS TO KEEP WAGES LOW, KEEP UNIONS OUT AND GIVE ALL SORTS OF TAX BREAKS TO INDUSTRY. Important businessmen and state officials make up the Board.

* * *

The legislature of Mississippi consists of a Senate with 52 members and a House of 122. The members are elected for four year terms at the same time as the governor. The legislature meets in regular session in even-numbered years from January until about June. Each House is the judge of the qualifications and election of its



members. A member of the House must be 21, a registered voter, and have lived in the state four years and in his county two years. A member of the Senate must have been a registered voter for four years and a member of the district from which he was elected for two years. Natchez has one representative all to itself. He is John R. Junkin. Adams County has one from outside of Natchez. He is Adrian Lee. Adams County also elects Senator Marion Smith. Although all are supposed to be Democrats, at least two (Smith and Lee) actively supported Goldwater in 1964.

* * *



The Mississippi legislature is very confusing. Many members are only there for one term, and in recent years the only activity has been fighting integration. A great many legislators are members of the Citizens' Council, including the presiding officer of the Senate, Senator Yarbrough. The governor may call a special session to consider only such matter as he specifies in his proclamation calling for the session. A special session was held this year to get around the 1965 Voting Rights Act. It resulted in the six-question form for voter registration. No one said they were in favor of Negroes voting; rather it was a question what would be the best way to keep Negroes from voting. All bills must be referred to a committee of each House and returned from there with a recommendation in writing before they can be passed into law. There are many committees. State legislators are mostly lawyers or farmers and the present lot is pretty hopeless. The legislature is only in session about a quarter of the time, so the governor and other state officers run things the rest of the time, both through the laws and through the medium of addresses and press conferences which are very important in forming public opinion.

THE GOVERNOR HAS CHARGE OF THE NATIONAL GUARD AND ALSO OF THE 475-MAN HIGHWAY PATROL, WHICH HE USES TO TRY TO STOP DEMONSTRATIONS WHEN HE FEELS IT IS NECESSARY.

Party Organization in Mississippi

Many states have their party organization only by custom. In Mississippi the law is rather definite about the matter. The party organization is important because it is the means by which delegates to the presidential convention are selected. It judges whether candidates have qualified to run in the primaries and whether they have won. It also adopts statements of principle or party platforms which are supposed to be followed by party members.

In Presidential election years, the whole apparatus is involved. The lowest level is the precinct convention. The electors of each precinct meet at 10 a.m. at the usual voting place on the date fixed by the state executive committee or chairman. They elect delegates to the county convention by secret ballot. The county executive committee fixes the number of delegates to be elected to the county convention.

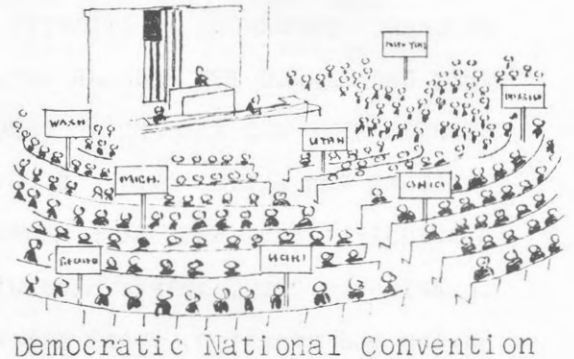
The county convention meets at the county seat on a day fixed by the state executive committee or chairman to select a county executive committee and elect delegates to the state convention. The 1964 county convention elected 25 delegates to the state convention.

(Although in theory ordinary people are allowed to participate, let's look who went from Adams County: The chancery clerk, sheriff, circuit clerk, tax assessor, four members of the board of supervisors, the J.P. for the 4th district, the state senator and two state representatives, the city attorney, an alderman, five attorneys, the director of the Natchez-Adams Co. Port Commission, a cattleman, a doctor, an insurance man and a businessman. All were white men.)

Delegates to the state convention hold district caucuses by congressional district either before or during the state convention. The delegates elect the party's state executive committee and the congressional district delegates to the national convention.

The state convention meets at the Capitol on a date fixed by the state executive committee or chairman to select delegates to the party's national convention, adopt a platform, nominate presidential electors and elect a national committeeman and committeewoman to represent Mississippi in national party affairs.

The county executive committee consists of three members from each supervisors district of which there are five in each county. The committee may also add three at large if it wants to. In the regular Democratic Party, this organization does not have much importance outside of elections.



Democratic National Convention



State Convention



District Caucuses



County Conventions



Precinct Meetings

In order to be a candidate, you file with the committee at least 60 days before the date of the first primary (except in municipal election, where you file 30 days before) and pay a filing fee fixed by the party committee. When only one candidate has filed for the primary within the time limit, the party executive committee may declare the nominee elected without a primary.

* * *

NEGROES IN MISSISSIPPI IN 1964 WERE NOT ALLOWED TO TAKE PART IN THIS PROCESS. THEREFORE AT ATLANTIC CITY AT THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION, THEY CHALLENGED THE REGULAR DEMOCRATIC DELEGATION ON THE GROUNDS THAT NEGROES WERE NOT ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE. THE WHOLE SYSTEM, IF FACT, IS DESIGNED FOR WHITES ONLY. HOWEVER, IN 1968 THE DELEGATION FROM MISSISSIPPI MUST HAVE SOME NEGROES. At the 1964 presidential convention in Atlantic City, only a handful of delegates supported President Johnson. During the campaign, local attorney Fred C. Berger argued for LBJ by saying Goldwater was an integrationist. In November, the vote was 5,900 for Goldwater and 1,093 for Johnson.

Local Government

The government of Adams County is basically controlled by five supervisors. There is one supervisor elected from each beat or district of the county. The supervisors must own \$300 in real property (like a house and land). They set local taxes, are in charge of road maintenance and repair, appoint certain officials, and pass various rules. The powers of the supervisors are very wide, but supervisors are not very well known to the community. The board members usually are in office for many years. They are elected at the same time as the governor.



Manchester Guardian
"Well what do you know, it does say
something about Race, Color or Creed."

IT WOULD BE VERY GOOD IF ONE OR TWO NEGROES COULD BE ELECTED SUPERVISORS. THE BOARD MEETS AT THE COUNTY COURTHOUSE ON THE FIRST MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH. IT MIGHT BE A GOOD IDEA TO ATTEND THE MEETING SOMETIME. The sheriff is the chief officer of the board. He collects taxes and also enforces the law. Sheriffs can only serve one term of office. They are usually very rich. Some have incomes of over \$50,000 a year.

The sheriffs want to change the law so they can stay in office for as long as they can.

Each beat also elects a constable and a J.P. The constable ranks as a deputy sheriff and is the lowest law enforcement officer in the county system.

* * *

The municipal or city government of Natchez is the one which we know best. Basically it consists of a mayor and six aldermen. Mayor Nosser was elected last year (1964) for a four year term in a very close race. He received 2,097 votes to 1,819 for John T. Green. The vote was as follows:

	<u>Nosser</u>	<u>Green</u>
1st Ward	273	185
2nd Ward	361	189
3rd Ward	265	222
4th Ward	336	320
5th Ward	421	420
6th Ward	441	483

NOSSER WON THE ELECTION WITH THE HELP OF NEGRO VOTERS. WHAT DID NEGROES GET IN RETURN? YOU CAN ANSWER THAT YOURSELF!!!

The aldermen and their jobs are as follows:

1st - Randall Ferguson, salesman for Armstrong Tire Company
2nd - Otis C. Montgomery, owner of J.N. Ratliff & Son Monuments
3rd - Ralph Sayers, retired
4th - Thomas J. Reed, industrial relations manager for Johns-Manville Corp.
5th - Louis Willard, Natchez Gravel Corp.
6th - Hall Wilson, Wilson and O'Farrell realtors

They can be said to represent the business interests of the city.

* * *

In the municipal separate district type of educational organization, the governing authorities of the city appoint the trustees. R. Brent Forman is the chairman of the Board of Education. He is also a director of City Bank and Trust Company. The school board accepted the loss of federal funds rather than desegregate. The matter is in the courts.

* * *

The Chief of Police is elected. However, the policemen in the department are under civil service. This has both advantages and disadvantages. While it is harder for racist police to be removed, it should make them more professional.

Discussion Questions

This is only a bare outline of the government of Mississippi. As Negroes begin to have the power of the vote, we must ask how to use it, and how to participate. Only whites who are at least in public segregationists hold public positions. Although "moderate" whites want compliance with the law in order to obtain federal funds and to attract more Northern industry to Mississippi, few Mississippians have taken a firm stand for equality. Because of the emergence of the Negro vote and of the popularity in Mississippi of Goldwater Republicanism, the future of the Democratic Party in the state is an open question.

What should Negroes do?

RUN THEIR OWN CANDIDATES?
FORM A COALITION? WITH WHOM?
USE A SWING VOTE?



Prepared by:
Freedom Information Service
Box 366
Edwards, Mississippi 39066