

TITLE: Grenada, Mississippi

DATE OF INVESTIGATION: September 19, 20, 1966

DATE OF REPORT: September 22, 1966

INVESTIGATED BY: Tom Scarbrough, Chief Investigator

TYPED BY: Elizabeth Arnold

Agreeable to orders from Director Johnston to proceed to Grenada and work with city officials in working out a plan whereby no acts of violence would likely occur during Martin Luther King's appearance on Monday and Tuesday, and to determine what response was being given to a petition which is being circulated condemning acts of violence which occurred on September 12 and 13, and further to determine who is behind building a Negro super market in Grenada, and if possible, determine who is financing the project and where it is located, I journeyed to Grenada on the above dates.

Upon my arrival there, I contacted Chief of Police Pat Ray and other officials to determine where the building is located and to get any other information possible concerning the financing, construction, etc. I was not able to get any information other than where the building is located. I was told that the City of Grenada does not issue building permits like many towns of its size.

I was told by the officers that the construction of the building had begun and it is located at the north end of Main Street, where Main intersects the Yalobusha River, and on the east side of Main, just inside the city limits.

They stated that a Negro by the name of Fox sold the property to the concern. Fox runs the Fox Negro Funeral Home. In checking a map of Grenada to determine the location of the property in question, I found that lot 254 is the property on which the building is being constructed in East Wood block.

I next checked the land records in the Chancery Clerk's office. I determined that on August 11, 1966, R. E. Fox, Negro funeral home owner in Grenada, sold the property to B & P Enterprises, B and P represents business and professional people). The deed stated that Fox received \$10.00 in cash and other good and valuable considerations. Only 55¢ in government stamps was placed on the deed which would indicate the property sold for \$500.00 or less. The deed was recorded in Book, 155, on Page 189, and called for lots 254-255-256-257, all lying along the south banks of Yalobusha River.

I then drove up to the building spot and found a building which was just being started and which had only the foundation laid and a few concrete blocks being laid at the time. No leveling of the land on the inside of the building had been done, nor on the grounds around it. Grass and weeds were growing on the inside of the walls and there were places which were four feet higher on the inside of the structure than other places.

James Bullock, w/m, from New York was on the job at the time of my arrival and is in charge of construction. Bullock, so I was told, is a construction engineer and is about 50 years old. He has been in Grenada living with Negroes ever since the Meredith march and has participated in most of the marches which have been going on nightly since he has been in Grenada. I was told by an FBI agent that Bullock has no subversive record to their knowledge; however, he is a known homosexual. I was also told that he has a wife and five children somewhere.

G. W. Bingham, c/m, school teacher, who is in charge of wood working shop at the Negro school in Grenada, is chairman of the store board of directors. Bingham's children are among the Negro children attending white schools in Grenada. Rev. Sharpe P. Cunningham, pastor of the Bell Flower Negro Baptist Church, where most of the civil rights meetings have been held, Willie T. Allen, Negro principal of Grenada schools, and Nathaniel Bocclair, Negro high school coach, are in charge of the financing and all co-signed the checks for building materials, etc., for the building's construction.

The B&P Enterprises account is in the Grenada Bank. Thus far, so I was told, the concern has collected through various methods \$18,000.00 which they obtained through selling stock or through some other unknown method. It is estimated the building will cost \$70,000.00 when completed. It is 60' x 110'. My guess is that at least from \$150,000.00 to \$200,000.00 will have to go into this venture for the construction, equipment, and stock before it is opened for business. I do not doubt that SCLC has put some money into this project. I was told, however, that most of the funds were obtained from Negro school teachers, who will share in the profits or losses of the operation. It is my thinking that whoever places any money into this project is likely being sold a gold brick as the location of the property is just below Bogue creek, which runs into the Yalobusha River in a low area and at times is known to get three and four feet deep in water.

Most of the people to whom I talked believe that the project is being financed by local Negro money; however, I was told by several different ones that Walter Reuther, head of the Auto Workers Union of CIO, planned to put quite a bit of money into the project but they say that Reuther withdrew his offer when it was discovered that SCLC officials were involved in an automobile theft ring in Atlanta, Georgia.

When I arrived in Jackson, I checked further with the Secretary of State's office to determine if the B and P Enterprises have applied for a corporation stock charter. I was advised by Mr. Ben Hawkins, who is in charge of that department, no one had applied for a charter in the name of B and P Enterprises, and he further stated that it is a violation of our corporation stock laws to sell stock in a corporation without first obtaining a charter from the Secretary of State's office. He said, however, a group of individuals could pool their money and start a project without a charter provided the amount of money pooled does not exceed \$1,000.00. He said, otherwise, the individuals under the law would be required to obtain a charter.

B and P Enterprises thus far have spent several thousand dollars no doubt on the project. They pay cash for all building supplies for the construction of the building. To my knowledge they paid \$500.00 cash Monday for a load of concrete blocks delivered to them from Clarksdale, Mississippi. The B and P Enterprises' store at this time is far from becoming a reality. King has stated that in addition to the building which they are now constructing that another building will be constructed later on the property which B and P now owns.

I did not actually find out the names of anyone owning stock in the B and P firm because communication between whites and Negroes in Grenada has almost completely stopped.

I next checked on the petition which was being circulated in Grenada condemning the violence inflicted on Negro children. I was advised that everyone signed the petition to whom it was presented except two people and that the petition contained more than 300 names of businessmen, city and county officials, and average Grenada citizens. One of the two people who did not sign the petition was an old man who felt that because of his age he should not get involved in any kind of controversy; however, his son signed it. I did not learn the name of the other one.*

When I arrived in Grenada, Monday, I found an entirely different atmosphere of concern rather than indifference to what I had previously observed. Grenada County officials and Mayor and City Councilmen met Sunday night and made plans to carry out properly the responsibility of Judge Clayton's court order by employing more policemen and instructing all officers to arrest any troublemaker who might get involved in racial matters. They also made arrangements on Monday morning to clear the square and the streets around the square to make sure that Martin Luther King got a safe and quiet reception while he was in Grenada.

King arrived in Grenada from Memphis by automobile around 5:00 P.M. He met with a group at the Bell Flower Negro church for a short while. Then he went down to inspect the new super market, which is under construction as previously discussed in this report. That night King spoke to a large group of Negroes at the New Hope Negro church. He complimented them highly for their accomplishments in carrying out his demands on the City of Grenada, and in the course of his talk pledged that Grenada would be further invaded until other demands were met. He also condemned the United States Senate for killing the civil rights housing bill that day.

Around 7:30 P.M., Monday night, one of the Highway Patrolmen advised me that I was wanted at the City Hall. I went to the Mayor's office and met with Mayor J. D. Quinn, attorney for the city Board, Brad Dye, Sr., Councilmen Henry Ray, Jr., John Brewer, and Gilbert Allen. They advised me that they had just received a telegram signed by Rev. J. T. Cunningham, Negro minister, and J. T. Johnson which requested a meeting with city and county officials in the offices of SCLC at 10:00 A.M. the next morning. They had already called Mr. Tom Watkins, their attorney on civil rights, in Jackson. He advised the officials not to meet with King and his group. Mr. Watkins also advised he would be in Grenada by 8:00 A.M. the next day. I felt this was the right decision at the time as King and his cohorts had already done about as much to the City of Grenada as they could possibly do.

*The older man is H. J. Ray, Sr., banker, and the other non-signer was Lee Spain, who operates a dry goods store.

Mayor Quinn called Director Erle Johnston and conferred with him about what to do in their present situation. Director Johnston also advised against meeting with the SCLC group.

After this meeting dispersed, I went up to the Grenada square to observe the march which took place around 10:00 P.M. The largest number of Negroes I have seen in Grenada took part in the march. It was estimated that around 650 Negroes participated. There was no one on the street at the time except the marchers, newsmen and photographers, and a few officers. King himself ~~did not~~ make the march. There were several white males and females in the march. Joan Baez, folk singer from California, who is a pacifist, was in the march. The Negroes marched around the square and sang their usual songs, doing the Congo twist at the same time. They returned to the Bell Flower church and dispersed without incident and apparently without anyone noticing them.

Tuesday morning at 8:00 A.M., all members of the City Council except one who had resigned and their attorneys, all members of the County Board of Supervisors and their attorney, the Mayor, Mr. Tom Watkins and I met in the City Hall to discuss the demands King's group had made by telegram the night before. It was the unanimous thinking of all of those present that the city and county officials should not meet with King and his cohorts; however, they did issue a statement to the effect that all people irrespective of race would be accorded the full benefits provided by law. King surprised many of us by leaving that day. Of course, his henchmen are still in Grenada and probably will stay for some time.

At the present, I feel for the first time since the Grenada turmoil began that relief may be soon coming to the city and county. For one thing, whereas the city and county law have been at odds and the white people divided for various reasons, I see evidence of all coming together and facing the problem now confronting Grenada people in a manner by which they may ~~work together~~ ^{work together} honorably.

While in Grenada, I checked with a number of businessmen who are being seriously affected by the boycott. All stated they could have gotten along very well without the Negro trade had their white customers continued to trade with them, but many expressed themselves as soon having to go out of business if white people do not resume trading. One white dry goods merchant, who had a nice line of stock, told me he did ~~not~~ make a sale Monday. Another dress shop owner told me she sold \$1.80 worth Monday. I believe the white people in Grenada will start back trading with Grenada merchants. Many of them quit because they thought local officers were permitting the Negroes to have more rights and privileges than they themselves had. Consequently, the merchants of Grenada have suffered from the lack of business from the whites as well as the boycott by the Negroes.

Grenada officials asked this department to assist in any way and by any means we could to help relieve the situation there. I advised the Mayor that we would send someone into Grenada to find out what can be done honorably to bring about normal conditions and that this would be done within the next few days, after which I would contact them. Grenada city and county officials appreciate the assistance this department has given them and gave high praise to all state officials and Governor Johnson for the assistance they have given them. Without the help of Governor Johnson many told me that the town would have been practically destroyed.

More investigation will follow.