

Mississippians United To Elect Negro Candidates

P.O. Box 202

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Dear Friend,

The Mississippi political situation presents Mississippi, and America, with a demanding and frightening dilemma. As a microcosmic reflection of the larger American political and racial scene, Mississippi is at a crossroad which is unique in the clarity of the problem presented at this juncture in history. And is yet ominous and uncertain of tomorrow's decisions, tomorrow's crossroads.

Either Black Mississippi will win its measure of participation and assume its right of self-determination, or Mississippi will be faced with a depth of racial frustration and despair which can only erupt in a torrent of bitterness and chaos. If Black Mississippians can find no avenue or political entrance into the halls of power, they will be faced with the choice of self-destruction and acquiescence to the power structure or annihilation of that American system which robs them of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The year 1967 is the crucial year in Mississippi. It is the year that government close to the people -- government that touches the daily lives of people -- must be elected.

In Mississippi the county government is a reality. The county boards of supervisors are responsible for raising and spending the tax dollar, deciding on the adequacy of health facilities, instrumental in acquiring industry, providing decent roads and recreational facilities, selecting the jury rolls and providing other important services for the people. It is the executive and legislative branch of local government. The sheriff, justice of the peace and constable are the representatives of Mississippi law. To Black Mississippians they have been the law; their word and their decisions have been inviolate. These officials -- supervisors, sheriff, constable, justice of the peace -- have acted toward Black Mississippi as if it did not exist except to be tools and instruments of White Mississippi's profit. But in the year 1967 Black Mississippians are saying that they too will be the law, they will also decide how their tax money is spent, that they have solutions to their problems.

More than 100 Black Mississippians are candidates for public office this year. They are running so that their people may have a voice in determining their own future. It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of candidates are running for the local offices, which have the most significant effect on the lives of Mississippians. The decision to avoid the statewide races and to emphasize the county positions is based on two hard-nosed realities: the ability to win, and the ability to bring about some concrete changes in the lives of Black Mississippians.

In many, if not most, counties where candidates are running for office, the Black community has a two to one voting majority. The de-

cision to run candidates where victory was possible necessitated leaving out some historic and symbolic trouble spots, but 1967 is not the year for "mock elections" in Mississippi.

If 1967 is to be the year for political victory in Mississippi, open and abrasive disunity must be avoided. It is interesting to note that although statewide unity in any organizational or formal fashion has not been achieved, there exists an informal and unarticulated agreement among the differing political camps within the Black community to co-exist throughout the election year. This degree of co-existence or cooperation is remarkable when one considers the fundamentally different approaches taken in the acquisition of political power.

On one side is the camp that believes political power can be realized within the structure of the Mississippi Democratic party. Where this idea prevails, the candidates have qualified to run in the party primaries.

On the other side of the road is the constellation of indigenous county organizations which reasons that the only way Black people can acquire power is to develop an independent Black political force. This camp believes that the Black community must build and solidify its own political base before there can be any significant and substantive political inter-action between Black and White political forces in Mississippi.

Consequently, the second group is running the majority of its candidates as independents (although not exclusively). In spite of these and other differences, the major forces within the Black community have avoided any open division, a consequence that would be disastrous for all the candidates.

We seek your support of these Black candidates in their bid to effect change in Mississippi. The desperate need for additional resources is outlined in the enclosed brochure. Additional information on the candidates and specific areas is available from Mississippians United to Elect Negro Candidates.

Sincerely,

MISSISSIPPIANS UNITED TO ELECT NEGRO CANDIDATES

Owen Brooks
Lawrence Guyot
Joseph Harris
Charles McLaurin
Hollis Watkins