

Mrs. Victoria J. Gray  
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### BLACK POLITICS IN MISSISSIPPI

I come in the name of black Mississippi. In the name of the only black, statewide, political movement in America. In the name of the only black grass roots, political network that could take power in entire areas of a state tomorrow. I bring you greetings from black people from the black belt from black Mississippi.

And I bring more. I bring news of triumph and of need. The triumph is 225,000 registered black voters where there were but 30,000 four years ago. The need is for massive economic and political aid to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

The triumph is more than that. It is a political miracle designed by black people. The triumph and the miracle is the unparalleled growth of a black, grass roots, political movement virtually undirected and unled. Where else but in Mississippi and in the deep south is the act of voting an act of bravery and the act of running for office a revolutionary act. And yet where else but in Mississippi are black people organized to take power county by county, town by town, precinct by precinct, all over the state and all without the technical and financial aid of a state-wide bureaucracy. Where else but in Mississippi does a state-wide, political movement depend for its financing upon sharecroppers' wages and the piddling pay black folk take from white folks' kitchens. Where else but in Mississippi.

In Holmes and Bolivar and Hinds and Sunflower Counties. In Yazoo and Issaquena. And yes, in my home county of Forrest. Black people have organized themselves to take power on the local level where they can change their lives. One hundred and twenty strong they are running for office, for town supervisor, for sheriff, for justice of the peace.

The word did not go out to the people to run for office. The word came up from the people. Gathering by night after long hours in fields and kitchens, they selected candidates from among their brethren to challenge local power in Mississippi. Avoiding the old elitism so common in American politics today, they chose to run for sheriff instead of governor, for justice of the peace instead of state attorney general, to put many men in office instead of one. At the risk of life and job they put up candidates all over the state. Given the black numerical majority in many counties, victory is inevitable for some. Sixteen who chose to run in the primaries have already won. Many others who preferred an independent political perspective have chosen to avoid the primaries and to run as independents in November. Many of these independents are from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. And there will be victors among them. At long last black politics in old Mississippi, the seat of all that racist oppression has come to mean in this country. At last black politics in Mississippi, the crucible of hunger, poverty, disease, and death even for white people, and how much more bitterly for blacks.

Mississippi cannot change America by itself, but America cannot change without Mississippi. You can vote against Eastland and Stennis in Congress, but only we can take these leaders of reaction out of office, and we have organized to do just that. While the country is in the throes of a social crisis, new black voters in Mississippi are in the throes of doing something about it, not through studies or commissions or meetings with the power structure but through political organization to transfer political power from an old reactionary white leadership to a new and radical black peoples' movement in Mississippi. We failed to

win the white man's respect and love. But in the process we learned something crucial: that we could win his political office by using black votes to seize the leadership he has exercised so treacherously and murderously against us.

You do not hear of Mississippi as you did in 1963 and 1964 and 1965. That is because our work now consists entirely of local political organization by local folk whose contacts are with the people and not the press. But make no mistake. We are organizing, precinct by precinct to take power right under the white man's nose.

And our new power in Mississippi will mean new change. Not the old oppressive Mississippi Democratic Party but the new Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. And not just the change of a name but the change of a white sheriff for a black one. That change in Mississippi means a change from oppression to justice.

Mississippi cannot change the North, but it is your only model for effective, state-wide, grass roots organization. Your political fate is tied in with ours. As long as the majority of us are poor or jobless or hungry, you must take greater financial responsibility for the black political movement in Mississippi. As long as we live behind a racist iron wall of terror, you must take responsibility for assuring federal support to us, whether in the form of federal voting registrars, free food stamps, or fair agricultural policy and welfare benefits.

Yet in many quarters of the liberal and radical North we in Mississippi have been forgotten. And for that you must bear responsibility. Many have forgotten that the vision and reality of the National Conference for New Politics took its inspiration from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and black, grass roots, political organization. Many have forgotten that you need us even as we need you if there is to be a reconstructed America. To forget the Mississippi movement is to lose a precious part of the hope for change in this country. The responsibility is yours.

Immediate aid is necessary to achieve black political victories in November. Here is what you must do now if you desire those victories. Form support groups for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party all over America--NOW! Form Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party sub-committees in existing organizations--NOW! Help us in our new goal to get seven organizations to finance one organizer for each of the five congressional districts in Mississippi and two for the state-wide Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party office--NOW! Increase massively the National Conference for New Politics allocation to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, to give MFDP work the priority it deserves--NOW! Send money immediately to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Box 447, Sunflower, Mississippi--NOW!

Until Mississippi is no longer a police state, you still have a responsibility to us who live under a regime of terror and oppression there. We must all free ourselves and we must all take responsibility for freeing one another. We in Mississippi are the wretched of the earth, but you are not so free yourselves. Our promised land and yours is this land right here, this land which we do not yet own, this land where the black and the powerless are struggling to achieve power. Join our struggle, and we will join yours.