

For release
in afternoon
April 27, 1952

VOTING RESTRICTIONS IN MISSISSIPPI

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The Negro registers and votes freely in only six of the 82 counties of Mississippi. These counties are Harrison, Hinds, Washington, Warren, Lauderdale, and Coahoma.

In 46 counties there is a situation where every now and then a favored Negro is able to register.

In the remaining 33 counties there is gross intimidation that creates a fear complex to such an extent that the Negroes in these counties are in most instances afraid to try to register. These counties include Calhoun, DeSoto, Carroll, Panola, Tallahatchie, Humphreys, Issaquena, Sharkey, Clay, Lowndes, Monroe, Lee, Alcorn, Choctaw, Neshoba, Attala, Yazoo, Montgomery, Bolivar, Tunica, Sunflower, Webster, Holmes, Itasca, Jefferson, Walthall, Clarke, George, Lamar, Pearl River, Wayne, Chickasaw, and Forest.

The Negroes of the state have appealed to the sheriffs and circuit clerks of each of these counties to cooperate in a movement to permit Negroes to register and vote. Still the report from the counties involved came back like this: From Holmes County, "No," Negroes are still denied the right to vote and register. From Issaquena County, "No relief," please keep working. From Sunflower County, "Things are the same," what next? From Humphreys County came the only report where Negroes actually fear physical violence if they attempt to register and vote.

The Negroes in other areas are more afraid of economic reprisals and pressures such as loss of employment and loss of credit. Some are just afraid to make the white people mad.

The Negroes are determined to pursue this issue until every qualified Negro in the state of Mississippi is free to register and vote.

In March of 1955, the legislature of Mississippi passed a bill that, at the time, its proponents openly admitted was for the sole purpose of retarding the vote of Negroes. This bill made it necessary for the prospective voter to interpret any section of the Mississippi or United States Constitutions to the satisfaction of the circuit clerk.

The circuit clerk himself may have never gone to school a day in his life, as there are no literacy requirements for circuit clerks. If a candidate for clerk can get the votes, he is in. And, as in most elections in Mississippi, the candidate that can yell "NIGGER, NIGGER" the loudest will be elected.

The application to vote in Mississippi makes it necessary for one to be more highly trained to qualify as a voter than to qualify as a school teacher. For in each of those counties where Negroes are barred from registering there are hundreds of Negroes teaching Negro children.

Here are specific instances of intimidation from three counties:

HUMPHREYS COUNTY

Mr. A approached the registrar in Humphreys County and requested permission to register. The person in charge informed him that the registration problem had caused bloodshed once in Humphreys County (obviously referring to the death of the Rev. George Lee and the wounding of Mr. Gus Courts) and advised him not to try.

BOLIVAR COUNTY

On the afternoon of March 12, 1958--just 6 and a half weeks ago--two special agents of the F.B.I. made a three-hour investigation of the refusal of authorities to allow Mr. A and others of Mound Bayou to register and vote. After the investigation the F.B.I. cautioned Mr. A not to discuss the conversation with anyone. One A.D. Saxton, a white local merchant and a member of the Citizens Council, demanded that Mr. A repeat the conversation between him and the special agents or there would be another Till case. Affidavits are in our files.

SUNFLOWER COUNTY

Negroes presented themselves to become registered voters. The registrar refused to register them by this ruse: "We'll have to wait until the state legislature adjourns; then we'll see about it."