

SHERIFF WON'T HALT NEGRO
VOTE TRIES

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI - Deputy Sheriff Andrew P. Smith of Holmes County told a Federal Judge January 4 he would put up no "stumbling blocks" to Negro voting.

Smith said he had refused to let Negroes pay their poll taxes in his county since 1956 because of a "misunderstanding." He said he understood that no Negroes were registered voters in the county and therefore none should pay poll tax.

A white Mississippi newspaper editor testified Smith had told the Holmes County Board of Supervisors in 1956 Negroes would not be allowed to register as long as he was sheriff. A Negro vocational teacher testified Smith told him to "get the hell out of here" when the teacher tried to pay his poll tax.

The testimony came at a hearing on a Justice Department request for an injunction against intimidation of potential Negro voters in Holmes County. The suit was filed last summer after Smith arrested four field secretaries from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and a Negro farmer on charges they fire-bombed the farmer's home to stir up sympathy for a voter registration drive. The charges were later dropped when a justice of the peace ruled there was not enough evidence to charge the five with arson.

When a SNCC field secretary took 17 Negroes to the Holmes County Courthouse to register to vote on April 10, 1963, they were met by six armed white men who kept all but two from entering the building.

According to the 1961 Civil Rights Commission report on Voting, there are 8,757 voting age Negroes in Holmes County.

Only 41 are registered voters.