

NEWS RELEASE
STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OVER 100 MINISTERS AID
MISSISSIPPI VOTE DRIVE

HATTIESBURG, Miss., Feb. 21 - Ministers from the north are continuing to come to this southern Mississippi city to aid in the vote drive which began January 22. Over 108 ministers and rabbis have been in Hattiesburg in the past month. They are continuing to arrive in groups of six every week, a lawyer accompanying each group. The ministers are from the United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, and the Methodist, Episcopal, and Presbyterian Churches.

Two ministers, a rabbi, and a lawyer who were here plus a local minister, Rev. John Cameron who leads the ministerial project, visited the Justice Department, Tuesday, February 18. They met with department officials, including Burke Marshall, for an hour to discuss the situation in Hattiesburg and the Justice Department's role here.

The ministers have been picketing at the county court house and have been participating in voter registration activities. There are only 53 registered Negro voters in the county out of a potential of 7,000. Individual ministers with a field worker from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) have been canvassing house to house to talk to Negro families about voter registration. They also explain points in the Mississippi constitution which prospective voters are required to explain to the registrar.

The teams have been speaking at block parties during the evening before groups of 12 to 15. They also attend mass rallies in local Negro churches.

"We remind Negroes of their basic rights," explained Rabbi Bleich of the Rabbinical Assembly, Committee for Racial Justice. "They need all the support they can get against local intimidation."

"Our presence gives the Negro the feeling he is not alone, that there are people willing to stand with him," said Rev. Larry Hill, a Presbyterian minister from Champaign, Illinois.

Largely as a result of the continued presence of the ministers, 40 Negroes applied to register on the first day. Another 140 applied by the end of the first week. To date, over 350 Negroes have applied to register. They are now waiting for 33 days to see if they have passed the literacy and constitution interpretation tests.

The ministers are also helping to collect information on threats, intimidation, and violence against Negroes who attempt to register. This information is given to the Justice Department which has had an injunction against the county registrar, Theron Lynd, since April 1962. The injunction orders him to stop discriminating against Negro applicants. Lynd was also convicted of civil contempt in spring of 1963 for his failure to register Negroes. Lynd has appealed to the United States Supreme Court.