



MISSISSIPPI VOTERS COULD CHOOSE NEGRO CANDIDATES

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI--Mississippi's registered voters--over 95% of them white--will decide at the polls Tuesday, June 2 if four Negroes will represent the state in Washington, D.C. next year.

The four--Mrs. Victoria Jackson Gray, and the Reverend John Earle Cameron, both of Hattiesburg; Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer of Ruleville, and James M. Houston of Vicksburg--are asking the state's voters to make a choice they've never been asked to make before. To choose between the white, segregationist regular Democrats and four civil-rights conscious Negroes running under the banner of the Freedom Democratic Party.

None of the Negro candidates expects to win Tuesday's election, but all hope to be seated in the House and Senate in January, 1965.

Although Negroes are more than 40% of the state's population, only some 20,000 Negroes are registered voters. Registered whites make up 95% of the electorate.

If and when the four Negroes lose, they plan to challenge the right of the all-white regular Democratic Party of Mississippi to claim to represent all of the people of the state.

Since Negroes are excluded, not only from voting but from participating in any phase of the party machinery, the four hope the National Democratic Convention in Atlantic City will refuse to seat the regular Democrats and will extend recognition to the Freedom Democrats instead.

The four have been waging active campaigns throughout the state. Mrs. Hamer, Reverend Cameron and Mr. Houston have confined their speechmaking and politicking to their respective Districts, but Mrs. Gray, who is running for the Senate seat of John Stennis, has been covering the whole state.

They will also run in a Freedom Election that will coincide with the official election. In a similar mock campaign last fall, an integrated slate running for the state's two top offices polled 80,000 votes.

The campaigns grew out of voter registration drives conducted throughout the state by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), now joined by the Congress of Racial Equality, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the state branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People under the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). -30-

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JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI - For the first time, this century, three Negroes are candidates for the House of Representatives from Mississippi.

They are: Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer of Ruleville, who will seek the 2nd Congressional District Seat held by ~~the~~ Representative Jamie Whitten of Charleston; Jake M. Houston, a 74-year-old retired Vicksburg furniture dealer who will oppose Rep. John Bell Williams of Raymond; and Reverend J. Erle Cameron, a 31-year-old Hattiesburg minister who will oppose Representative William Colmer of Pascagoula.

Mrs. Hamer, who qualified March 20 in Jackson, is 47. Her husband, Perry Hamer, is employed at a Ruleville cotton gin.

Until 1962, the Hamers had lived for eighteen years on a plantation near Ruleville, but were evicted when she tried to register to vote.

Mrs. Hamer opened her campaign the evening she qualified with a speech at a Ruleville mass meeting. She spoke at a Freedom Day mass meeting in Greenwood on Saturday, March 21, and appeared at an Itta Bena mass meeting on Sunday night, March 22. Her schedule for the first week of her campaign includes speeches in Charleston, Clarksdale and Marks, Mississippi.

The 2nd District includes most of Mississippi's Delta, an area of high Negro population and low Negro voter registration.

Mrs. Hamer has announced she will challenge Rep. Whittens right to a seat in the U. S. House if she loses.

Two campaign workers were arrested in Ruleville the day she qualified. A Freedom Vote campaign for Governor last summer, which featured an integrated slate of candidates for the state's top two offices, resulted in over 60 arrests in 25 Mississippi towns. That campaign, like Mrs. Hamer's was sponsored by the Council of Federated Organizations. COFO workers expect additional harassment during her campaign, and have included a \$10,000 "harassment" item in her campaign budget.