

March 16, 1965

TO: ALL MEDIA:

FROM: JAMES FARMER, CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY; LAWRENCE GUYOT, CHAIRMAN, MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY; JOHN LEWIS, CHAIRMAN STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE

The securing of the right to full participation in the political life of our nation for all American Citizens has made a major advance with the determination expressed in the non-violent movement in Selma, Alabama, and the strong commitment made Monday night by our President, Lyndon Baines Johnson. We shall join with the Administration and the Congress in the task of insuring that the legislation passed will effectively protect and implement the right to vote.

The shocked conscience of America, however, must realize that determination and commitment cannot be satisfied merely by speeches or even by strong legislation--as important as that surely is. We cannot relax our efforts until the exercise of the rights to register to vote, to organize politically to assemble and to petition--in groups or individually, in Selma, Alabama, in Indianola, Mississippi, or in Jonesboro, Louisiana,--are fully supported and actively protected. This must be done by local, state and federal governments--not at some date in the future--but now.

To this end these first steps should be taken immediately:

1. An executive order requiring enforcement and protection of all constitutional rights by Federal Marshals and FBI agents.
2. A change of Justice Department policy by issuing regulations requiring on the spot arrests of violators of Title 18, Section 241-242 of the U.S. Code.
3. Legislation making murder in connection with civil rights a major federal offense.
4. Including in the voting bill provision for implementation of the 15th Amendment by calling for new elections for all offices no later than nine and no sooner than four months after federal registration of voters begins.
5. In cases where machinery is set in motion, as in the Mississippi Challenge, immediate unseating of all Congressmen elected from districts in which there is denial of the right to vote to a substantial percentage of citizens.