

STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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LIBERTY, MISSISSIPPI - After eleven years of trying, an Amite County Negro has become a registered voter.

Since 1954, Amite County farmer E. W. Steptoe has tried to register at the county courthouse here. His first attempt was made the year the United State Supreme Court ruled segregation in schools was illegal. He tried again in 1956 and again in 1957. After a four year lapse he made other attempts in 1961 and 1963.

But on July 20, 1965, he and 36 other Negroes became registered voters. According to Steptoe "Everyone was polite; not a cross word from anyone."

For years Mr. Steptoe, a small man, has traveled across this Southwest Mississippi county urging other Negroes to take the step that has almost cost him his life - the drive to the registrar's office in Liberty.

County law enforcement officials broke up a voting rally held by Steptoe in 1954, and confiscated a list of Negroes who had wanted to register to vote.

Crosses have been burned on Steptoe's property, and law men here have told him he will die because of his voting activity.

Steptoe was the first and only Amite County Negro to open his home to workers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1961, when SNCC began its first deep South voting project. Steptoe still houses voter registration workers, and keeps three rifles and a .45 caliber pistol handy to ward off night attacks.

He maintains contact with the Southwest Mississippi project office in McComb and with civil rights workers who operate from his house with a short wave radio. One set is in his bedroom; another in his car.

Less than 100 yards from his house is the home of white farmer E. H. Hurst, a former member of the Mississippi State Legislature, and a white Citizens Council member. Hurst shot and killed Herbert Lee, another Amite County Negro active in the voting drive, in Liberty at a cotton gin in 1961. A Negro witness to the shooting was found shotgunned to death outside his home on February 1, 1964.

Neither Steptoe, the members of his family nor the rights worker who live in his home will walk down the road outside his home after dark.

"Some of the whites are just itching to snipe at us," Steptoe says, "and I for one don't plan to give them that opportunity."