

Depositions taken in West Point, Mississippi (Clay County)
On February 6,8,9, 1965

Three days of depositions were taken in Clay County and a total of 16 witnesses were heard. The hearings were extremely successful,, and at times there were as many as many as 50 people (excluding members of the white establishment) who attended to hear witnesses tell of fear and intimidation in the Negro Community regarding the right to vote and generally about civil rights participation. The hearings were held at the 3rd Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church in West Point. Opposing lawyers (form Miss.) were Mr. Prather, Mr. Edwards, and Mr. T.J Tubbs. all form West Point On the third day an attorney form Eupora was there. A summary of the testimony follows:

Joel Bernard, 19 a COFO worker form New York, testified that he had been arrested twice, once for "trespassing" on a public gas station and once, during the Freedom Vote, for passing out posters for Lyndon Johnson. He had also once been beaten up by a local white citizen, and had himself (but not his assailant) been taken into custody by the police. He also testified to the reluctance of the Negro community to register because of fear of reprisals.

Mrs. Dora Adams, FDP member, who house COFO workers, testified that she had gone down to the courthouse to register 8 times, taken the test three times before passing the registrar was often not there). She testified that on two occasion crosses had been burned in front of her house, several times bricks and bottles and cherry bombs had been thrown at her house. (one bottle was thrown a few nights after her testimony).

Eddie Brooks, 18, a COFO worker (Negro) form Chicago, testified to being arrested twice, once during the Freedom Voet while taking ballots and once for demonstrating in front of the city jail. He said that after he used the bathroom in the county courthouse a white man said that if he did that again the man was going to "get him some black neat".

Mr. Lem Young testified to his fear for his job when he attempted to register and to the fear of the Negro community that was motivated by a quotation form a local lawyer (Mr. Tubb, who was present, although his name was not mention that "appeared in the newspaper several years ago" that said that any Negro that voted should be taken behine the barn, and beaten. The clipping was introduced into evidence at the hearing in Starkville Miss.

Rev. T.L. Johnson test ified to the harassnent he had suffered when he registered some year ago. He was followed and threatened. He also testified about the fear of teachers that they would lose their jobs if they registered to vote. At a conference in Jackson they were advised to take no part in politics. He also testified that he spoke to Carl Rice a local student, who said that he was forced to leave the state because his father had been threatened with loss of his city job because of his son's civil rights activity

Bob Gilman, 20, a COFO worker testified tto the fears of reprisals if Negroes registered. He was arrested twice, once during the Freedom Vote and once for demonstrating in protest against the arrest of Carl Rice on charges of " inciting to riot ". He had also been ordered out of the courthouse after requesting public information.

Mrs. Jonnie Jackson testified that after her name had appeared in the newspaper after taking the test, she received abusive phone calls. She said that when she first went down to register, and on other occasions, the registrar was not there and when she returned later the courthouse was surround by helmeted police, She also testifie to the fear of the Negro community.

Mrs. Lillian Purnell testified that she had gone to the courthouse several times to register, and that the registrar had been rude to her on several occasions, before she regisered.

Mrs. Georgia Roby, 74years old, testified that when she went down th e courthouse to register the registrar had told her not to have any thing to do with the civil righ workers or listen to them ., also questioned her as to why she wanted to vote.

Mr. Charlie Graves, testified that he had been up to the courthouse eight times trying to get registered, but due to the absences of the registrar he had taken the only 4 times, failing, say his interpretation was "good, but not good enough". Mr. Graves is an active member of the FDP and went to Atlantic City and Washington.

John Bell, a local student, testified about the fears of the Negro community about voting and about his mother's fear of his involvement in the civil rights activity. He was arrested twice, once while taking ballots in the Freedom Vote and once on a trumped up charge of disorderly conduct and petty larceny. He has been harassed by police.

Spurgeon Evens, testified that a representative of a credit company told him that his credit would be cut off if he messed with the civil rights workers, the man indicated that this had already been done in a couple of cases. Mr. Evens said that he would "wait a bit" before attempting to register.

Four people from Maben, a small town on the Webster-Oktibbeha County line testified to the beating and harassment in that town. one woman testified that her father was taken into a field and beaten by a white man. Her nephew, a deaf and dumb mute, is beaten by his white employer when he is sick and unable to work. On one occasion last year he was beaten and the sheriff was called by the employer. He was put in jail and his father offer to pay \$25 dollar fine and was refused, and his employer paid \$10 to get him out, then took him to work. G.W. Gates testified that he had been blacklisted and was unable to get a job in the only town industry, a pulpwood plant, because of his civil rights activity, Another man had also lost his job and unable to get work. They testified of being chased by white mens with shotguns and forced off the road by pickup trucks because of the work with COFO. They had been orderd not to participate in a recent ASC election, as had many other Negroes.

Three other people from Clay County testified at the hearings in Starkville on Feb. 11, 1965 and the summary of their testimony is available from COFO there.

A few people have volunteered to testify during the rebuttal perior and it was recommended that we subpoena Mr. Tubb, who made the statement in the newspaper; Mr. Walker, the registrar; Mr. Strickland, the Sheriff; and Mr. Smith, the Chief of police.