

DIARY OF FREEDOM DAY

March 13

March 12, 1964

About 10:30 p.m. we got a phone call from Mr. Robert Moore of the Justice Department. He told us that the registrar, Foote Campbell, would not be in his office on Friday, March 13, as he was appearing in person at a hearing in Jackson. Mr. Moore had been informed that law enforcement officers would not allow law enforcement officers on the courthouse square.

We talked a little bit and talked with Dave Dennis and Bob Moses on the phone. No conclusions were reached.

Possible alternatives included:

- (1) Marching on the courthouse
- (2) Picketing the courthouse
- (3) Sending down a token group to be refused
- (4) Holding Freedom registration
- (5) Using this opportunity to organize the assembled group into precincts.

March 13, 1964 FREEDOM DAY

No definite decisions of large policy were made in the morning as far as planning the day was concerned. The outline to be followed was this, namely:

- (1) Send a token group down in cars to the courthouse. When they were turned away, they were to be returned to the church.
- (2) Discuss Freedom Registration and the precinct system with those at the church, interspersing the educational program with songs and relaxation.

The same scheme of police cars loaded with officers and pickup trucks filled with deputies was used by the local authorities. The trucks and cars started early in the morning, sitting outside the freedom house, following cars around, asking questions of anyone when they felt like asking questions.

At about 9:10 a.m. John Newman was questioned by a driver of one of the pickup trucks. One photographed John with a movie camera while the other asked whether John had met the sheriff. John said that he had met the sheriff last Wednesday. The deputy replied that he would like John to come and check in with the sheriff. Newman asked whether he was being arrested or not. The deputy replied no, so Newman asked whether he had to come. The deputy said no, so Newman said he would prefer not to.

At about 9 a.m. Art Thomas of the Special Commission of Religion and Race of the National Council of Churches, Ken Thompson and Virgil Gant of the Associated Church Press were stopped while driving up to the Freedom House. They were told to report immediately to the sheriff's office. At the sheriff's office in the courthouse they were photographed and asked to give complete identifying information about themselves. There was a ~~movie camera~~ ^{still camera} operating. They were told that Ken Thompson almost got himself killed by talking to the wrong people and saying the wrong things and taking pictures at the last Freedom Day, February 28, 1964. In line behind them were more ministers and Mandy Samstein of COFO.

At about 9:20 a.m. Mr. Bennet's station wagon, containing Dave Dennis, Mattheo Suarez, Mr. Bennet, and Mandy Samstein and James Collier was stopped by a pickup truck. Mandy was taken out and told to go in the trunk to the sheriff's office. Mr. Bennet was then allowed to proceed.

When James Collier called to tell about Mr. Bennet he said the church seemed full.

James Cheney came in with Mr. Bennet at about 9:45 a.m. At that time Mr. Cheney reported that the road to Farmhaven was filled with people waiting for a ride into town. He estimated 100 people out waiting for a ride. Attempts were being made to find a way to ferry people in, but transportation was hard to come by.

John Due, the lawyer from the VEP, came in about 10:45. He had been down to talk with the sheriff. The Sheriff would not release C. C. Chinn. The sheriff said he was not going to release Chinn and have him participate this day in the demonstration. The lawyer was told that if he returned on Monday something might be arranged.

About 11 a.m. the sheriff and [redacted] dropped by at the freedom house and asked for George Raymond. When they could not find George, they asked for information about what was going to happen during the day. Would there be a march? When would it be? [redacted] said we would go to the courthouse when Mr. Campbell returned.

At 10 a.m. Landy McNair reported that there were about 150 people gathered at Pleasant Green Church.

At 11:15 a.m. we received word that 15 people were going down to the registrar's office to stand and wait. We were told to call UPI and AP and tell them that there was going to be a march of some 150 or 200 people on the courthouse this afternoon at 1 p.m.

At 11:15 a.m. over 200 persons stood on the lawn of Pleasant Green Church of Christ and sang We Shall Overcome. At the same time three cars containing fifteen persons left the church and were corralled by police officers. They were only allowed to circle the church. All of the cars then circled around another block and went to the courthouse on the second try. Meanwhile Reverend McCloud led the crowd in freedom songs and prayer. George Raymond and Theodios Hewitt and [redacted] went with the cars.

Theodios Hewitt returned to Pleasant Green Church and reported that fifteen people were standing in line in the courtyard waiting to register. The police were questioning George Raymond when Theodios left.

When Theodios pulled up and parked at the courthouse city policeman Cook(s?) said not to get out of the car until he told them to. The cars were unloaded one at a time, first George's car, then [redacted]'s car, then Theodios' car. Before Theodios unloaded Cook said to him what are you all planning to do today. Who told you to bring these people up here? Theodios said none told him; the Negroes in Madison County decided they wanted to come to the courthouse. Cook said did you bring any lunch? Theodios said no. Cook said no serving lunch in the courthouse. Cook said what do you plan to do, stay all night. Then he walked away after telling everyone to get out of the car.

March 13, 1964

FREEDOM DAY Page 3

After Cook walked away plain clothesman John Chance came up to Theodios Hewitt and asked for his driver's license. Then he asked where Theodios was going, back after a load of people? Theodios said he didn't know.

~~Wd/7p/5p/7p~~

Andrew Green has informed us that this morning a busload of people came from Madison to the courthouse. They were stopped by a policeman at the courthouse and told _____

They turned around and went back to Madison, because they didn't know where the church was.

At 11:45 a.m. when the ministerial press returned for lunch they told us that the white ministers are being told as a part of their talk with the sheriff not to go into the Negro section of town. We do not yet know how they have responded to this warning.