

Canton weekly report, March 9 thru March 15, 1964  
CANTON, MISSISSIPPI

This was a week largely devoted to preparations for the second Freedom Day on Friday, March 13. The week closed with staff attending a COFO staff meeting in Jackson on Saturday; many community people joined the staff in attending the state-wide COFO Convention in Jackson on Sunday.

Chronological outline

Monday, March 9, 1964 Many staff persons in Jackson talking with FBI. Attorney Robt. Moore of Justice Dept. discusses possible meeting of Negro leaders with registrar Campbell. Negro leaders meet and decide not to meet with registrar Campbell. Mass meeting at Pleasant Green Church in the evening. Other mass meetings in the rural areas.

Tuesday, March 10, 1964 Morning workshop for staff. Staff split--some to rural areas, some to Canton. Ministers meet and approve sending letter of complaint to city officials. Workshops and mass meetings in the evening.

Wednesday, March 11, 1964 Staff workshop in early morning. Staff split up for work as on Tuesday. Workshops and mass meetings in the evening.

Thursday, March 12, 1964 Some staff work as on previous days. Workshops and mass meetings in the evening.

Friday, March 13, 1964 Freedom Day

Saturday, March 14, 1964 Heavy rain curtails registration activities. Staff meeting in Jackson.

Sunday, March 15, 1964 COFO Convention in Jackson.

Staff work

Staff workshops were valuable. They served to organize work in the morning so that people were actively busy during the rest of the day. The workshops also improved understanding and communication between staff members. Some staff members were able to express feelings they had been holding back on before.

A big problem for some staff members in working the rural areas had been transportation. By organizing more efficiently at the morning workshops the available cars were better deployed, and more staff could actually visit their areas.

In the city of Canton teams of two were sent out to start on an organization of a block captain system. The main emphasis in canvassing in Canton was to ask people to set up voter registration workshops in their homes in the evening. These people were then to be used as block captains. The scheme of asking people to specifically do something like hold meetings was generally felt to be more successful than just talking about general voting. The evening workshops were very successful in terms of bringing interested people together in groups and helping one another.

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Suggested interview between Negro leaders and registrar

Judge Cox had suggested that an interview between the registrar and the Negro leaders would be a good idea. In a discussion Sunday afternoon with Robt. Moore of the Justice Dept. a decision was reached by the staff that the meeting should take place on Negro ground or not at all.

On Monday Mr. Moore came to say that Mr. Guy Rogers of the State Attorney General's office, allegedly the most moderate of the Mississippi state attorneys, wished to join the meeting.

On Monday afternoon Negro leaders meeting with some staff persons decided that such a meeting with the registrar would probably lose more than it would gain. The general history of such meetings in Mississippi seems to be that they result in non-enforceable agreements between local parties.

Freedom Day, March 13

Late Thursday night we received a phone call from Robt. Moore of the Justice Dept. He informed us that the registrar, Mr. Campbell, would be in Jackson at least all morning long on Friday to testify at a hearing. Several phone calls to state staff leaders produced no particular plan for Friday.

Friday morning people came in from the rural areas as they had before on February 28. Many failed to reach Canton for lack of rides. The police had the courthouse blocked off and were not letting people line up. As many as possible were directed to the Pleasant Green Church by movement workers, but many rural people returned to their homes.

All strange white people in town were asked to come to the sheriff's office for questioning. There they were asked to fully identify themselves and were told they would not be welcome in the Negro section of town. The visiting ministers from the National Council of Churches never ventured out of the center of town all day as a result of this.

At the church the people assembled, sang songs, and heard speeches until late morning. Then a group went down to the courthouse and stood outside, saying they would wait for Mr. Campbell's return. When no one was arrested, the rest of the people in the church went down and joined them. Altogether over 100 people stood in line to register.

At one point during the day the sheriff came to the Freedom House and asked what was going to go on during the remainder of the day.

The people themselves made the decisions during the day. They decided on all the moves and carried out the program themselves. The staff was just there as support but did not actually force any program on the people. The people in Canton seem to be grasping what they are doing and why.

The registrar returned about 1 p.m.

A series of threatening phone calls were received by the office in the evening and by Mrs. Robinson, a local worker.

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Harrassments

C.O. Chinn and Scott Smith remained in jail all week. During the early part of the week the sheriff was not in his office and supposedly could not be reached, although he was seen elsewhere in the county. A lwyer from the Voter Education Project, a Mr. John Due, came in on Friday, March 13. The sheriff told him that he (the sheriff) was not going to let Mr. Chinn and Mr. Smith out that day because he was determined that they should not take part in the demonstration that day. There was a brief discussion with the staff about the further legal possibilities.

At least ~~two~~<sup>six</sup> people are known to have lost their jobs on account of taking part in at least one of the two Freedom Days.

We have heard that oil distributing companies are taking tanks away from farmers who participate in movement activities. We have no specific statements in our records to this effect as yet. We know that there are cases of gas pump removals here in Canton. We are considering the possibility of national pressures on the oil companies concerned.

Registration estimates

Date	Number attempted	Number successful
Monday, March 9	15	?
Tuesday	10	?
Wednesday	8	?
Thursday	7	?
Friday	125	?
Saturday, March 14	2	?

The number of successful applicants is not known because the registrar is not telling the applicants how well they are doing when they take the test.

The registrar was taking up to three applicants at a time during most of the week.

The staff working this week in Canton was George Raymond, Matt Suarez, Richard Jewett, John Newman, Andrew Lee Green, Landy McNair, Joe Lee Watts, Marcellus Byrd, Theodios Hewitt, Lenora Thurmond, James Collier, James Cheney. Volunteer workers were Maggie Smith, Sylvester Palmer, Doug Smith, Preston Ponder.

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