

RAYMOND WATTS
227 EAST JEFFERSON STREET
NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

July 15 1964

H. B. Law,
333 North Michigan Ave.,
Chicago,
Illinois.

Dear Hugo,-

Following our phone conversation last night I am recording here the details of my difficulties in reaching the office of the C.O.F.O., 507 Mobile St., Hattiesburg, Mississippi. As I told you my son Tom Watts, of Berkeley Calif. is a member of the Mississippi Summer Project and has been working to establish a negro school at Laurel, Miss. where he has encountered many difficulties, threats of violence, etc.

On the afternoon of July 7 my friend Jerry Ziegler called my attention to a story in the New York Times, page 20, of that date stating that Tom and a companion had been arrested by the police.

I immediately placed a call to C.O.F.O., 507 Mobile St. Hattiesburg, Miss. to get details. I had no other address. On being told by the Chicago operator that Hattiesburg reported there was no phone in this name I was permitted to speak direct to the Hattiesburg operator. I talked to two different Hattiesburg operators, tried several different names, Church Federation, etc. at this address and always got the same answer that they had no such phone listed at this address.

Finally I called the office of Mr. John DeButts of the Illinois Bell Telephone. He was not in his office but his secretary quickly understood what I wanted, told me she would find the number and call me back and in a few minutes called me back and gave me the area code and number of the C.O.F.O. phone and in five minutes I was in highly satisfactory contact with the C.O.F.O. office in Hattiesburg. Quite a difference between Chicago and Hattiesburg.

I understand from conversations with other parents of people on the Mississippi Summer Project that this type of thing is as common as other forms of harassment. I will try to collect other instances of this sort of thing and ask others to write you the details and perhaps they can be brought to the attention of I.T. & T. officials.

as ever

R. Watts

President of Chicago Urban League

July 17, 1964

Mr. Jess Clawson
American Telephone & Telegraph Co.
32 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York 10013

Dear Jess:

Attached is a copy of a letter from Raymond Watts, whose experiences with the Hattiesburg, Mississippi, telephone people I told you about.

Mr. Watts may be considered an entirely accurate and responsible reporter. He has also assured me, as he says in his letter, that he will try to locate specific evidence of similar experiences on the part of other Chicagoans.

I am sure you will be glad to have the report on the excellent handling of this situation by Mr. deButts' office, here. But, the contrast seems to point up the fact that Mississippi, as well as Illinois, is supposed to be a part of the Bell system, and A. T. & T. must share in the blame for this type of corruption of a public service. I am sure that your people in New York will agree that they should take all possible steps to clear this up.

Along with Mr. Watts' efforts to detail other cases, I shall also make some inquiries in other Chicago groups which have occasion to use the phone between here and Mississippi.

Thanks, again, for your interest in this. I will be looking forward to further word from you.

Sincerely,

HLB:jkg
enc.

P. S. Since writing the above, I have had a call from Hale Nelson, here in Chicago, suggesting I should have told him about this in the first place. I have written him as attached.

July 17, 1964

Mr. Hale Nelson, Vice President
Illinois Bell Telephone Company
212 W. Washington
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Hale:

Thank you for your call about the Mississippi matter.

To begin with, please don't feel that I have any mistrust of the Bell system's intent in matters of this kind. I could only wish that all of the big, national corporations had the same sense of responsibility about their own affairs in the South.

I am enclosing a copy of the letter I received this morning from Raymond Watts, which gives you the details of his experience with Hattiesburg. I have just had another talk with him, and he tells me he is trying to get specific information from other parents of people in the C.O.F.O. project who say they have had similar difficulties. I have, of course, impressed him with the fact that such information must be highly specific.

I shall keep you informed on any further developments I hear about and sincerely appreciate your interest in the matter.

Sincerely,

HBL:jkg
enc.