

August 7, 1964

I was present at a most interesting, and possibly historic, political convention yesterday—the State Convention of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in Jackson. There were five T.V. cameras and the powerful lights needed—from NBC and ABC (that I know of—I didn't spot CBS by name). Time and Life and all the other major news media were present with their photographers. The Convention was chaired by Aaron Henry, Clarkedale druggist—colored—and a remarkable young man by anybody's standards. When the 5 delegates to the National Democratic Convention were named, he led the list of balloting.

One doesn't know the significance of this new party. From the standpoint of the Negroes, it is their determined effort to replace the regular democrats in seating at Atlantic City. Most of the activity of the "summer project" in Mississippi, by the volunteers such as ours here at Clarkedale, has been to secure the registration of Negroes in this party. Coahoma County (Clarkedale) has some 2,500 signed up for the party. I will enclose the registration form—identical with that required by Mississippi law with the exception of that part which the officials require, to read and interpret a section of the Mississippi Constitution. This, of course, is the discrimination clause used so effectively against the Negroes. Also, the enclosed form has no literacy clause. Those who cannot write may use an X, properly witnessed. I have gone out a number of times to secure these registrations—and my car was used on one afternoon when the workers were arrested and chased.

There is some evidence that this new party will figure in National politics at the Convention. A legal advisor to the party is a member of the National Credentials committee. He told the delegates the requirements to be met to force a show down on seating the Freedom Delegation, and he was optimistic concerning the whole thing. With the regular Mississippi delegation refusing to support the President, this thrust might just become a tool to force it into line.

But win or lose, it was thrilling and sobering to see these people—fine, disciplined, dignified, making a go at citizenship and responsibility—for the first time in their lives. "Doc" Henry, a college graduate—successful business man, leading his people, many of whom, like him, have "arrived" in every respect except that of their Constitutional rights.

Another week or two and many of the kids will be returning to their colleges across the country. They will have spent a worthwhile summer, instead of the things that so many college kids do on vacation. Best wishes—be sure to watch the Democratic Convention!

August 11, 1964

Well, I preached again last night—at Jerusalem Baptist Church, laymen's meeting—attended mostly by women, and not a full house either! I guess it is as hard to get a crowd out during the week as it is at home. This time I had notes, and actually I was more worried about whether I would do all right than I had been when I "ad libbed". Something about the pressures and enthusiasms of the spur-of-the-moment, you know! Do you remember my sermon from Genesis where Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree they weren't supposed to eat, then God called "Where are you?" Everyone said he "enjoyed" it, although I noticed lots of people asleep. Later that evening, when we were back at the house, Mr. McMillian, our host, and also the one in charge of the service, bubbled with excitement and pleasure from the meeting. "Where art thou?" he called out, to no one in particular. Then I realized that I ought to have used the King James Bible instead of the one we are all used to at home.

I saw the look of satisfaction on the face of a lady who "passed" the voter registration test yesterday. Actually, she took the test more than a month ago and had to wait 30 days to learn if she passed. Another lady had been in the Court House earlier in the day, with a letter telling her that she had passed. It seemed that the Registrar had notified her originally that she did not pass, but a review commission

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changed his verdict. She is a school teacher. You would think she could pass! So that made two. Most of the others didn't even finish the test, so of course they couldn't pass. (Unless, of course, they would have been white, then it would have been different.) Trouble for all of them, they are past the deadline date for voting in the November election.

August 13, 1964

Last night we had a Memorial Service for the three Civil Rights workers killed in June. I presided over the service, and the Rev. C. T. Vivian, Atlanta, Georgia, director of Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, gave the address. Some say he is the most articulate of all the leaders. I took some notes. There was a sense of this being the closing event of the summer program. Today a number of the volunteers went home. This week-end will see others on their way, and Loris and I plan to head home soon.

This morning I had my picture taken with two local Negroes—one who "passed" the voter registration test and one who failed. The girl who passed is a senior student at a Vocational College. The man has reason to believe he ought to have passed, so we are encouraging him and our lawyers to file under a provision of the new Civil Rights law, requiring the Registrar to show him wherein he failed. This man, a cement finisher by trade, is a cut above the rest of the people, and so he might be a good one for a test.

Voter Registration is so very slow. We are not starting any new applicants at all, merely driving to the Court House with men and women who took the test 30 days ago. To my knowledge, only 3 persons have been accepted so far this week out of a hundred or so who took the test early this summer. I really think part of the reason is our concentration on the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and perhaps for good cause.

A few workers are coming in to Clarksdale, to man the program as we leave. Some of the local people are taking a more active role. I imagine there will be a solid core of Civil Rights workers on hand the year around, perhaps to accomplish a good deal, in a disciplined efficient manner. At least I must hope so, because only thus can I bear to leave the project, and hope that it will continue to serve the needs of an awakening people.

To say we will be glad and anxious to see you will be the understatement of the summer!

--Frazer and Loris Thomason