

AFFIDAVIT IV.

INTIMIDATION TO STOP SUMMER PROJECT (Police Brutality)

Charles McLaurin, 23, Negro, native Mississippian and field secretary for SNCC told in an affidavit what happened to him and four other SNCC voter registration workers in June 8, 1964, in Columbus, Mississippi. McLaurin was later a Summer Project director in Ruleville.

On that date McLaurin and James Black, Sam Block, Willie Peacock and James Jones set out from Greenwood, Mississippi, to attend a SNCC conference in Atlanta, Ga.

He said they were followed by a car all the way from Greenwood to Starkville and that after several attempts to lose their "tail," they found the car still following them outside Columbus, Miss. McLaurin stated:

"At this point, the car turned off its headlights and pulled up right behind us. There was one white man in the car. We all ducked down and pulled over to the side of the road. He passed and we continued on. We passed his car again just outside the Columbus city limits, when he pulled off on a side road.

"About five blocks after he turned off, we were stopped by a highway patrolman. At the time we were stopped we were doing nothing to break the law. In the scout car was a patrolman named Roy Elders, and another man in plain clothes. Elders came to our car and said, 'You're the niggers who are going to change our way of life.' He then asked us why we were trying to run a car off the road. At no time had we done this.

"He then told us to get out of the car and we did. The sheriff of Lowndes County then drove up and said to Elders, 'What have you got there?' Elders said, 'These are the niggers who are going to change our way of life.' The sheriff asked who was driving the car, 'That little short nigger there?' Elders replied, 'No, this big, fuzzy-lipped m _____,' referring to James Black."

McLaurin said all of them except James Black were handcuffed and driven to the Lowndes County jail. Black was left with patrolman Elders.

"At the jail about twenty minutes later, James Black came in with Elders. Black's head was dirty; one side of his face was swollen out of shape; one of his eyes was blackened and bloodshot, and blood was running from his swollen mouth. His clothes were also torn and disarranged. He walked up to me and said, 'He beat me,' pointing to Elders. Elders said, 'This boy fell getting out of the car.' Black's physical condition made it impossible for me to believe Elder's statement that he had merely fallen."

McLaurin stated that the five were put in a cell and that shortly thereafter a white turnkey came and told Sam Block to come with him for an 'interview.' He said Block was taken outside, and that he could hear sounds of a beating and groans. He said Block was brought back to the cell holding his sides, his mouth swollen.

"The turnkey then said, 'Next,' and Peacock went with him. He returned a few minutes later and said he had been hit in the mouth. His mouth was swollen...

"I went out next and was taken outside. Elders asked, 'Are you a Negro or a nigger?' I said, 'I am a Negro.' Jolly, another highway patrolman, hit me across the face with his forearm. Elders repeated the question, and my answer was the same. I was then punched hard in my left ear by Elders and knocked to the ground. The highway patrolmen helped me up and one of them said, 'Boy, can't you stand on your own two feet?' They stood me up against the wall and repeated the question. This time I answered 'I am a nigger.'

They then lectured me and told me nobody wanted me in town and I should leave. Elders said, 'If I ever catch you here again I'll kill you.'

"They took me upstairs to my cell. James Jones was taken out and came back with a swollen lip saying he had been hit in the mouth. The next day James Black was charged with reckless driving, and running a stop sign. He was not, to the best of my knowledge, guilty of either. He was fined \$28 and we were released."

James Jones said in an affidavit that when he was beaten, Elder "kept calling me a black nigger and said he would put me on the county farm for twenty years and that if he ever saw me after that he would kill me. Elder asked me if I had been born in Mississippi. I said yes." He asked me whether I'd ever been in a position where the niggers didn't help me but the whites did. I told him I'd been poor all my life...

"I spent the night in jail with the rest of the fellows. We were all in pain. At no time was I informed of the charges against me or allowed to make phone calls. The next morning (June 9), we were all fingerprinted and photographed. I asked the sheriff what we were charged with, and he said reckless driving and possession of illegal literature."

Samuel Block, in his affidavit, quoted the jailor as saying, "The river is just right; let's carry them out and rifle them right now."

"Elder hit me on the cheek with his fist. I staggered and fell back to the window, and he grabbed me and hit me in the groin with his fist very hard. I fell down and he kicked me hard in the shin...He asked if any white person has mistreated me in Mississippi. I answered, 'Yes, you are mistreating me now.' He hit me again with his fist and knocked me back. When it was over, I could just barely make it back upstairs to the cell. I fell to the concrete floor and blacked out and lay there for about 20 minutes."

Block said Judge R. V. Whittaker questioned him about himself and James Black. Block said he did not answer any questions about Black, and that the judge replied, "You can sit there and act a damn m f fool if you want to, but we are trying to help this 17-year-old boy whom we have charges on."

Block said a man he believed to be the prosecuting attorney told him that if the traffic charges against James Black were not appealed, the other charges against the five would be dropped; and that if there was an appeal, the other charges would remain.

Willie Peacock described his beating in another affidavit:

"Elder hit me twice with his fist. He asked me how old I was and I told him. He said, 'Nigger, you just want to die young. I'd just as soon shoot you now as to look at you. Do you believe it?' I said yes. He said, 'Nigger, I'm gonna erase that bit of doubt out of your mind. And if you come back here again, I'm going to roll you out as thin as cigarette paper.'"