

LOWNDES COUNTY

I am 18 years old and live in Ruleville, Mississippi. On the afternoon of June 8th, 1964, Charles McLaurin and I started out from Ruleville. In Greenwood, Miss., we picked up Sam Block, Willie Peacock, James Jones. Our destination was Atlanta, Georgia, where we were to attend a meeting of the SNCC staff.

Between Mayhew Junction and Starkville we were followed by a '56 Mercury. The car pulled up behind us and cut his lights off, then pulled out like he was going to pass and then didn't pass. We slowed down at that point. At Mayhew Junction he turned off. At the intersection of Rt. 45 and 82 the highway patrol pulled up behind us and pulled us off the road. Officer A_____, the highway patrolman, said to us: "You god-damn niggers want to change our way of life." He then told me (I was driving at the time) to get out of the car. Then he told the others to get out on the other side of the car and stand by our car. Then he searched the car. He then went to call Officer B_____ and told Officer B_____ to pick us up cause we were "god-damn niggers trying to change our way of life." Then we were searched one by one. By this time Officer B_____ had arrived.

Officer B_____ handcuffed all of the others, but not me. Then he told me to pick up all the literature in a box and put it in the back of his car. (The literature was Mrs. Hamer's campaign literature and Summer Project brochures.) After I put the literature in the back of his car he told me to get in the back of his car (a '63 white Ford). He told me he was going to take me to the courthouse but before he took me to the courthouse he took me out of the car; I refused to get out. So he pulled me out. He started hitting me with his fists and after about twenty blows he got his blackjack out and hit me one time with it and knocked me down. Then he told me to get back in the car. While he was beating me he asked me if any white folks had ever treated me bad; I told him yes and he hit me again. He asked me again had any white folks in Mississippi treated me bad and I told him no. At that point he helped me back into the car. Then he took me to the county jail (Lowndes) where I was questioned by Officer B_____. He asked for my driver's license and to take everything out of my pockets. Then he told me to step back and told the others to do the same, i.e., to take stuff out of their pockets and step back. Then we were taken into a cell; there was only one cell in the jail so we were all together; a girl and three other boys besides us were all together in the cell. In about 5 minutes I was called again to be questioned and was taken to Officer B_____'s office. I had a friend's ID card in my pocket and he asked me if my friend was a Negro or a nigger. I told him a Negro. The same highway patrolman was there and took out his blackjack and again asked if my friend was a Negro or a nigger. He started to hit me with the blackjack and I told him my friend was a nigger.

Then I was taken back to the jail; 5 minutes later Officer C_____ came to take one of the other guys out. He took Sam Block to Officer B_____’s office, asked him a few questions, and beat him up. Then Officer C_____ brought Sam back and took James Jones out. Then he brought James back and took Willie Peacock out. Then he brought Willie Peacock back and took Charles McLaurin out. In each case they were beaten right in Officer B_____’s office.

We were kept in jail overnight and the next morning about 10 A.M. we were taken down to the city police department and fingerprinted and photographed and interviewed again. We were asked names, addresses, and phone numbers and asked where did we work. I am a day laborer and told him so. Then we were taken to the court; the presiding judge was Judge_____. I was charged with reckless driving. We were going about 35 miles an hour when the incident occurred. He said I was in the wrong lane, which is untrue. I was also charged with running two stop signs, which was false. After this the judge told me to sit down and that my trial, the State of Mississippi vs. James Black, would begin. I was asked questions then such as: “Were you encouraged to drive the car?” I told him no. I told him I was a day laborer. “Are you on the NAACP staff?” I told him no. “Do you belong to any organization?” I told him no. Then he told me to sit down again and called in the other boys one by one. Then they were asked the same questions: Were they on the SNCC payroll. They answered yes. Then we were all told to go out while they had a conference in the courtroom. About five minutes later I was called back alone. Then I was told that he was going to let me off light providing I would leave town and never return. He charged me \$5 for running each stop sign and \$2 for driver education and charged the other four \$4 each for the night they spent in jail. The reason he didn’t charge me the \$4 fee was because I had been officially arrested. We were then taken back to the jail and given our personal belongings. After which we paid the fine and a city policeman drove us to the filling station where the car was. We were charged \$2.08 for storage. Then we continued our trip to Atlanta.

Officer A_____, the highway patrolman, has a badge number _____, and his license tag number was _____. We were followed between Mayhew Junction and Starkville between 10 and 10:30 P.M. and were stopped by the highway patrolman at about 10:30 P.M.

SIGNED: *James Charles Black*