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### The Situation ~ Mississippi Freedom Summer, 1964

According to the Census, 45% of Mississippi's population is Black, but in 1964 less than 5% of Blacks are registered to vote state-wide. In the rural counties where Blacks are a majority — or even a significant minority — of the population, Black registration is virtually nil. For example, in some of the counties where there are Freedom Summer projects (main project town shown in parenthesis):

County (Town)	Whites			Blacks		
	Number Eligible	Number Voters	Percentage	Number Eligible	Number Voters	Percentage
Coahoma (Clarksdale)	5338	4030	73%	14004	1061	8%
Holmes (Tchula)	4773	3530	74%	8757	8	-
Le Flore (Greenwood)	10274	7168	70%	13567	268	2%
Marshall (Holly Spgs)	4342	4162	96%	7168	57	1%
Panola (Batesville)	7369	5309	69%	7250	2	-
Tallahatchie (Charleston)	5099	4330	85%	6438	5	-
Pike (McComb)	12163	7864	65%	6936	150	-

Source: 1964 MFDP report derived from court cases and Federal reports.

To maintain segregation and deny Blacks their citizenship rights — and to continue reaping the economic benefits of racial exploitation — the white power-structure has turned Mississippi into a "closed society" ruled by fear from the top down. Rather than mechanize as other Southern states have done, much of Mississippi agriculture — particularly the Delta cotton plantations — continues to rely on cheap Black labor. But with the rise of the Freedom Movement, the White Citizens Council is now urging plantation owners to replace Black sharecroppers and farm hands with machines. This is a deliberate strategy to force Blacks out of the state before they can achieve any share of political power. The Freedom Movement is in a race against time, if Blacks don't get the vote soon, it will be too late.

In Washington DC, Mississippi's Congressional delegation of five Representatives plus Senators Eastland and Stennis are among the most racist and reactionary in the halls of power. With Blacks disenfranchised, the state's undemocratic, good 'ole boy, crony politics returns the same corrupt incumbents to Congress year after year, allowing them to build seniority and amass enormous power over process and committees. They use that power to block civil rights legislation, prevent the Federal government from defending racial minorities, and halt any national program or reform that might benefit the poor and working class regardless of race.

Everyone, white and Black, understands that when Blacks try to vote they are defying a century of oppression and demanding social, political, and economic equality with whites. For three hard years the Mississippi Freedom Movement has been trying to register Black voters against the adamant opposition of the white power-structure, the vicious terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan, and the economic warfare of the White Citizens Council. Blacks who try to register still face intimidation, violence, and arrest at the Courthouse, a phony literacy test, tricks, and abuses from the Registrar. After leaving the courthouse, they face arrest on trumped up charges, Klan violence, and economic retaliation — evictions, firings, foreclosures, business boycotts, license revocations, credit denials, and insurance cancellations. And lest there be any doubt as to whom should be targeted for this retaliation, the names of those attempting to register are published in the local newspaper.

With steadfast courage, freedom fighters have suffered and endured beatings, jailings, shootings, bombings, and assassinations in places like McComb, Jackson, Greenwood, the Delta, and Hattiesburg. They have built a broad and determined mass-movement, yet no more than a few hundred new voters have been added to the rolls. The number of Blacks registered by the Mississippi Movement is so small that at the end of 1963 the Voter Education Project (VEP) halts all funding for COFO projects because they are simply not cost-effective. The VEP grants are critically important, without them the Mississippi Movement faces financial starvation.

Violent repression of Blacks is a traditional component of Mississippi's "*Southern Way of Life*." Since 1880, the state has averaged more than six racially-motivated murders per year in the form of mob lynchings and "unsolved" assassinations. After three years of sit-ins, Freedom Rides, pickets, rallies, marches, and thousands of arrests, the fundamental rights of free speech and assembly are still denied to Blacks in Mississippi — any act of defiance, any protest, any cry for freedom, is still met with violent state repression and immediate arrest.

Despite their many public promises, neither Kennedy nor Johnson take any effective action to defend Black voters in the Deep South. Though laws are on the books

making it a Federal crime to interfere with voting rights, neither the FBI, nor the Department of Justice (DOJ), nor the Federal courts enforce those laws. The FBI is able to track down and jail bank robbers, counterfeiters, and kidnappers, but when crimes against Blacks are committed right before their eyes they claim they are "only an investigative agency" with no power to make arrests. The DOJ files lawsuit after lawsuit, which they often win in court, but nothing changes and no voters are added to the rolls because no action is taken against the politically well-connected officials who violate the law and flout the court rulings. And there is no relief in sight because the Johnson administration has stripped out any effective voting rights protection from the draft Civil Rights bill being debated by Congress.

While most of the national media covers dramatic, photogenic events such as the Freedom Rides and the Birmingham marches they either ignore the issue of Black voting rights or relegate coverage to small articles on the back pages — leaving most Americans unaware of the brutal realities in the Deep South.