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The University of Southern Mississippi

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI, CONTESTED:

THE ALLIED STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND HUMAN DIGNITY

By

Matthew David Monroe

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in History

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December 2011

## ABSTRACT

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI, CONTESTED:

THE ALLIED STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND HUMAN DIGNITY

by Matthew David Monroe

December 2011

Utilizing monthly reports and correspondence of civil rights organizations, in addition to newspaper coverage, oral histories, and memoirs, this study shows that a grassroots, community-driven movement mobilized in Mississippi's capital to challenge institutionalized discrimination. Yet, racial identity did not dictate exclusively how White and Black Mississippians responded to the unfolding Civil Rights Movement. Conflicting and shifting motivations shaped the nature, extent, and pace by which Blacks and Whites challenged or protected status quo discrimination. The Jackson Movement began as early as 1955 and sustained protest activity into the 1960s. By the summer of 1965, Jackson's Black community secured most of its original demands for nondiscriminatory service and employment, but competing socioeconomic interests increasingly limited the pace of further social change in Jackson and in the broader Mississippi Movement.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

I love my children and I love my wife with all my heart...and I would die,  
and die gladly, if that would make a better life for them.  
---NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers, June 7, 1963—assassinated five  
days later

Historian Harvard Sitkoff suggests that, by the twentieth century, institutionalized discrimination in the United States “had undermined the nation’s democratic institutions for nearly two hundred years.”<sup>1</sup> Americans had failed to uphold the original republican ideal of unfettered liberty as consecrated within the Constitution and as a result, argues Historian Chana Kai Lee, the twentieth century Civil Rights Movement and its subsequent evolution into the Black Power Movement in the United States represented a “fight for political and economic freedom” or, put another way, an effort by black Americans to exercise meaningful control over their economic and political destinies without impediment.<sup>2</sup> Since Africans had arrived in colonial America as indentured servants and slaves during the mid-sixteenth century, whites relegated them to substandard housing, few opportunities to earn more than a subsistence living, unequal social privileges, and second-class citizenship. With few exceptions, white Americans justified this discrimination through a common perception that blacks were biologically, socially, and culturally inferior.

By the mid-twentieth century, institutionalized discrimination continued unabated throughout the United States, but unlike the rest of the nation, the South maintained a

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<sup>1</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992, revised* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), viii.

<sup>2</sup> Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom’s Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), ix.

legal code known as segregation, which created and sustained separate and unequal public facilities and services for black Americans. White officials barely funded black schools and limited black access to largely dilapidated public facilities, while white community members and businesses regularly served black Americans in a discriminatory manner, designating certain areas for service and refusing to address them with courtesy titles. Furthermore, Chana Kai Lee explains convincingly that institutionalized discrimination facilitated a disturbing, yet relatively common problem, of “sexualized racial violence” that helped to reinforce a culture of white privilege and black powerlessness. Because they were often believed to have transgressed social mores, black women faced an omnipresent threat of molestation and rape with little or no legal recourse against their attacker while segregationists often took particular interest in emasculating men by referring to them as “boy,” striking their genitals, or forcing them to shave and strip nude.<sup>3</sup> Also unlike African Americans in other regions of the country, black southerners lacked voting rights which left them essentially powerless to elect leaders responsive to their needs. The Civil Rights Movement, in response, represented part of an extended historical process by which black Americans sought to challenge and ultimately dismantle institutionalized discrimination. Participants involved in the freedom struggle worked to secure social justice, or rather, equitable access to viable housing, employment, food, healthcare, education, and equal protection under the law for black communities and prompted black Americans to reject commonly-held assumptions of black inferiority in order to internalize a more positive image of their racial identity.

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<sup>3</sup> Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, x; see also Danielle McGuire's *At the Dark End of the Street* and Katherine Charron's *Septima Clark: Freedom's Teacher*.

Until the late 1990s, scholarship on the Civil Rights Movement largely credited well-known social and political leaders, particularly Martin Luther King, Jr., for sparking a nation-wide challenge to institutionalized discrimination during the mid-twentieth century. Yet, a growing collection of scholarship illuminates the importance of community-driven activism rather than centrally organized leadership for driving civil rights protest activity. John Dittmer's *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* and Charles Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* collectively shifted the focus away from well-recognized historical actors, who nonetheless were vital to the movement, and instead examined the contributions of "everyday people," or the multitude of largely unknown men, women, and children who mobilized and sustained a grassroots struggle for civil rights in Mississippi. Dittmer and Payne utilize the experiences of grassroots organizing in impoverished Delta communities as a lens to understand how activism unfolded throughout the state. They explain how civil rights activists from outside Mississippi traveled to the state to help local black communities organize themselves for social, political, and economic uplift. Payne furthermore argues convincingly that the success of Mississippi's civil rights movement relied upon the close-knit interpersonal relationships between activists and the black communities in which they lived and worked.<sup>4</sup>

Like Dittmer's and Payne's, this study focuses largely on events in Mississippi, but more specifically the struggle within the capital city of Jackson. As an urban center

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<sup>4</sup> John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 19; Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 2-5.



and seat of power for the state's white power structure, Jackson differed from most communities in the Delta where wealthy planters and industrialists exercised incredible control over the social and economic lives of black Mississippians. This control was often enforced by the threat of vigilante violence. Uncomfortable with a perceived image of "lawlessness," white officials in Jackson including Mayor Allen Thompson preferred instead that police and white businessmen handle individuals who violated social mores by arresting them or by employing economic reprisals. This project attempts to provide a narrative of twentieth century civil rights protests that occurred in Jackson, but set within the broader context of the Mississippi and much broader black struggle for freedom.

Well publicized events such as the 1961 Freedom Rides and the Freedom Summer of 1964, of course, continue to garner widespread attention from the public, but analysis of the extended chain of events associated with the Jackson Movement illuminates a more complicated understanding of how the community mobilized and sustained a grassroots movement for social justice. Dittmer too narrowly defines the Jackson Movement as a brief, but highly publicized period of protest activity that occurred between December 1962 and June 1963. Yet, by examining activity that preceded and followed the protests of December 1962 to June 1963, this study broadens the definition of what constituted the freedom struggle in Mississippi's capital.

Furthermore, in the Jackson Movement, as in the broader Civil Rights Movement, some black and white Americans openly supported challenges to discrimination, while others staunchly resisted changes to the status quo. Other blacks and whites exhibited a conflicted attitude towards segregation that, for many of them, fluctuated over time in response to shifting socio-political events of the 1950s and 1960s. White and black

Americans, influenced partly by their socioeconomic standing, race, gender, age, political leanings, and religious views, struggled either to dismantle institutionalized discrimination in Mississippi, to protect it, or were reluctant to act either way. This helps to explain why neither Jackson's white or black community presented a monolithic response to the civil rights struggle in their midst. Disagreements existed within and between civil rights organizations over protest strategy preferences, leadership roles, publicity, and funding, while members of Jackson's black community similarly argued over the nature and extent to which they worked with activists, if even at all. Individuals in Jackson's white community, on the other hand, debated over what tactics they believed were most effective for undermining civil rights activity or the extent to which they were willing either to enforce or to help to dismantle segregation. This study attempts to illuminate the shifting nature of how complicated motivations drove individuals to help uphold or to help undermine institutionalized discrimination.

Chapter I introduces the four major civil rights organizations that coalesced during the twentieth century and traces their movement into Mississippi. It also explains how Medgar Evers of the NAACP mobilized a grassroots civil rights movement in Jackson, and when joined by more activists in 1961, presented a powerful threat to city officials by December 1962. Chapter II examines the way in which community youths prompted even black conservatives to join a major wave of demonstrations throughout 1963 until a compromise with city officials offered token concessions. Although black conservatives briefly stopped protest activity, young people nonetheless continued direct-action protests and soon rekindled movement activity with wide support within Jackson's black community. Meanwhile, members of the four major civil rights organizations

reorganized an alliance called the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) to mobilize politically black communities to challenge segregation. Chapter III charts the growing progress by Jackson Movement personnel in forcing concessions from the power structure while members also worked within the COFO-led project to challenge Mississippi officials politically. Yet, growing tension over funding and policy formation gradually strained the alliance to its breaking point. This project concludes with a discussion of how white Mississippi moderates and black conservatives forged a political alliance to limit the speed of social change by impoverished black Mississippians and their militant activist allies.

This study challenges Dittmer's interpretation of the Jackson Movement by arguing that a local, grassroots civil rights movement mobilized in Jackson, Mississippi, as early as 1955. Dittmer's argument that executive officers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) killed the Jackson Movement in June 1963 obscures other factors that shaped civil rights activity in Jackson. Together with out of state activists and volunteers, Jackson's black community forced city officials and most white-owned businesses to desegregate public facilities, end discriminatory hiring and service practices, and extend the franchise to African Americans by the summer of 1965. Yet, a major schism increasingly pitted conservative, mostly middle-class black Mississippians, including NAACP staff, against largely impoverished black Mississippians supported by militant activists from the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and other civil rights organizations over the extent to which black communities sought to address continuing social and economic problems after passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Growing

disillusioned with the slow progress in achieving social justice, militant black Mississippians and their allies attempted to organize independent social institutions that addressed the needs of their community, but in the process, increasingly alienated northern white liberals and the federal government. Conservative black Mississippians, who had previously assisted movement activity, and white moderate Mississippians increasingly undermined community-driven uplift efforts in favor of a more moderate response to addressing continuing social problems through the political machinery of the Democratic Party.

CHAPTER II  
COMMUNITY AND COMRADES: EVOLUTION OF THE JACKSON CIVIL  
RIGHTS MOVEMENT

There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair.  
—Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham City Jail,” May 1963

Historian John Dittmer suggests that a grassroots civil rights movement in Jackson, Mississippi, began “inauspiciously in late 1962 when the north Jackson Youth Council of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) announced a boycott against downtown merchants, charging them with a broad pattern of discrimination against Black workers and consumers.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, if defined more broadly to include other civil rights protest strategies such as voter registration activity, picketing, and courtroom litigation, the Jackson Movement began, much earlier, in 1955 when the NAACP organized a petition drive to pressure city officials to desegregate public schools. In the following years, young people and their adult NAACP allies slowly mobilized the Black community of Jackson for social change, and when joined by members of newly formed civil rights organizations by 1961, the Jackson Movement represented a powerful challenge to Mississippi’s segregationist power structure.

Myrlie Evers, wife of NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers, recalled that before the 1954 *Brown* decision, “most Mississippi Negroes had slumbered along under a

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<sup>1</sup> John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 157.

system of segregation that was a part of the fabric of their lives.”<sup>2</sup> Southern White leaders regularly underfunded Black schools compared to White schools, while the political and business elite denied Black Mississippians most opportunities to earn more than a subsistence living. Members of the White Citizens’ Council, organized in 1954 by Robert Patterson and administered by William J. Simmons, were dedicated to preventing Blacks from gaining social, political, or economic equality with Whites and lodged economic reprisals, such as denying loans or terminating employment, against anyone perceived as having challenged social mores. Meanwhile, state and local officials maintained a complex web of legal requirements for voting that, in most cases, successfully kept African Americans off the voter rolls, denying them any meaningful control over their political and economic destiny. The state’s broad law enforcement network maintained this status quo through arbitrary arrest and harassment, while White vigilantes, who often enjoyed police assistance, readily employed violence against anyone perceived to have violated social norms.<sup>3</sup>

Institutionalized discrimination in access to viable housing and employment, funding for educational facilities, and equal protection under constitutional laws pervaded not just Mississippi and the South, but represented a national problem for African Americans. In response, the NAACP formed during the early twentieth century as an integrated organization dedicated to challenging discrimination throughout the United States via courtroom litigation. By 1920, the NAACP operated branches across America,

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<sup>2</sup> Myrlie Evers with William Peters, *For Us, the Living* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 144.

<sup>3</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 6-7; Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Struggle*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 34-35; Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 288-89.

including in Mississippi, but widespread fear of segregationist retaliation discouraged most Black southerners from joining the organization. Mississippi and other southern states, therefore, remained firmly within the grip of segregationist governments and White citizenry during the early twentieth century.

Yet, a second civil rights organization emerged that helped to challenge institutionalized discrimination in America. Formed by dedicated pacifists Bernice Fisher, James Robinson, James Farmer, Joe Guinn, George Hauser, and Homer Jackson in Chicago during 1942, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) advocated direct, nonviolent protest as a means of social and political protest. Although Illinois state law prohibited discrimination in eating establishments, several Chicago eateries such as Jack Spratt's and Spencer's regularly refused to serve African Americans or to treat them with respect. In response, the growing membership of CORE attempted unsuccessfully to negotiate with owners to end such practices. By December 1962, CORE members distributed leaflets, protesting the undignified treatment of Black customers, in an attempt to reduce patronage. By January 1943, staff began planning for the nation's first sit-down demonstrations whereby a large group of interracial protestors occupied most seats in a restaurant and refused to move unless served in a dignified manner. By June 1963, revenue losses from sit-in protests prompted Jack Spratt's and Spencer's to begin serving customers non-discriminately, demonstrating the potential effectiveness of nonviolent confrontation as a means to challenge discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

Until the end of World War II, the NAACP and CORE operated largely outside the South, but returning Black veterans precipitated a shift by which the NAACP and

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<sup>4</sup> August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 13-14.

CORE paid greater attention to the affairs of southern Blacks. Empowered by their service abroad, Black veterans sought meaningful expression of their citizenship, namely the right to vote. Scores of them attempted to register to vote across the South, but segregationists often threatened to kill them. On July 2, 1946, future NAACP Field Secretaries Medgar and Charles Evers, both veterans, attempted to register in their hometown of Decatur but were intimidated and turned away by twenty armed White men. The growing number of Black veterans who joined the NAACP, however, prompted chapters across Mississippi to form the State Conference of Branches in 1946 to coordinate dialogue and strategy with each other and with the national staff.<sup>5</sup> The NAACP continued its efforts to secure the franchise for Black southerners and to desegregate public transportation facilities through litigation, but historian Patricia Sullivan suggests that the “fight against school segregation [soon] became the dominant focus of the southern campaign.”<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, CORE realized that it could potentially garner national publicity and new membership by nonviolently testing southern compliance with the Supreme Court’s recent *Morgan* decision, which outlawed segregated seating arrangements in interstate travel. An integrated group of CORE members took a two-week “Journey of Reconciliation” through Virginia and North Carolina in 1946. Although the demonstration did not prompt a change in their enforcement of transportation laws, the ability of CORE staff to challenge segregation and prompt only a few arrests and little

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<sup>5</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 29; Myrlie Evers-Williams & Manning Marable, eds., *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers: A Hero’s Life and Legacy Revealed Through His Writings, Letters, and Speeches* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005), 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), 336.



intimidation gained positive national attention for the organization and for the strategy of nonviolent protest.<sup>7</sup> The Journey of Reconciliation made clear the distinct strategy differences between CORE and the NAACP during the 1940s and 1950s. Bayard Rustin and George Hauser of CORE were “impatient with the NAACP’s [conservative] approach” by fighting discrimination through litigation, while Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP warned that nonviolent civil disobedience in the South would “bring wholesale slaughter and achieve nothing.”<sup>8</sup> Given the numerous atrocities White vigilantes had committed against Black Americans in the South, Marshall had reasonable concerns to urge a less confrontational approach to securing equality, but members of CORE, who were no less cognizant of the dangers involved, were convinced of the necessity of utilizing nonviolent confrontation as a means secure civil rights.

In 1951, the NAACP strengthened its presence by sending to the Deep South newly appointed regional coordinator Ruby Hurley. Upon arrival, she urged the national office to expand its financial and logistical support for voter registration, school desegregation, and membership campaigns. While CORE did not organize any southern branches until 1959, historian Patricia Sullivan points out that the national office of the NAACP and its legal teams “worked closely with branches, advising them to petition school boards to initiate desegregation, work with other community groups, and monitor local sentiments” over the course of the 1950s.<sup>9</sup> Into their midst, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), a third major civil rights organization, evolved out of the 1955-1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott. Protesting discriminatory seating arrangements on

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<sup>7</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 33-39.

<sup>8</sup> Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 343.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

public buses, Black community members E.D. Nixon, Jo Ann Robinson, and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) organized an alternative transportation system for Black commuters while they negotiated an end to discriminatory busing regulations. For over a year, the Black community boycotted city bus companies, economically crippling them, which eventually prompted business leaders and city officials to halt discrimination in public transportation.<sup>10</sup>

Although the NAACP made relatively slow advances in the South, the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board* ruling that declared school segregation unconstitutional represented a milestone for challenging discrimination in the courtroom. After the decision, the national office began formulating plans to coordinate school desegregation efforts through its network of branches. When in 1955 Medgar Evers became Field Secretary in Jackson, he and national staff planned a petition drive by which he would call upon Black families to sign a petition demanding the city's compliance with the *Brown* decision, which initiated the beginning of the Jackson Movement. A number of Jackson-area families signed the petition, but members of the recently formed Citizens Council retaliated immediately against them. WCC leaders fired some signatories and denied loans to others. In exchange for relative protection, some Black informants spied on supporters of the petition and provided information about them to White authorities. Unidentified Whites then called prospective signers, threatening to harm them. Black educators in the area, who feared losing their jobs, largely criticized the petition drive,

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<sup>10</sup> Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 399-401; Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992, revised edition* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 44-52.

and over the short course of the petition drive, Evers noticed that almost all signatories frequently changed their minds and ultimately withdrew their support.<sup>11</sup>

Dittmer suggests that in wake of the petition drive's relatively limited success, the national NAACP office responded to this defeat "by dropping Mississippi like a hot potato."<sup>12</sup> Yet, evidence reveals that during the 1950s, the organization merely shifted its strategy in the state during the late 1950s rather than abandoning its Mississippi branches. Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins informed Medgar Evers in 1956 that "we should like to begin a long-time program of education and training for registration and voting in several of the Southern states" and emphasized that "this will not be a ballyhoo campaign."<sup>13</sup> By April 1, 1958, the State Conference of Branches finalized its plan to organize voter registration workshops that taught individuals in Jackson and Meridian, Mississippi how to complete a voting application. Two months later, voter registration projects were organized in the urban centers of Laurel and Vicksburg. In Jackson, precinct clubs and volunteers distributed ten thousand handbills and one hundred placards that urged citizens to pay their poll tax. While implementing its voter registration program, the NAACP also conducted a membership drive to replenish its depleted ranks in Mississippi. In April 1958, Evers directed each branch in the state to organize a Youth Council to attract younger members, which modestly improved the organization's overall membership.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Evers with William Peters, *For Us, the Living*, 146-48.

<sup>12</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 52.

<sup>13</sup> Roy Wilkins to Medgar Evers, December 18, 1956 as quoted in Evers-Williams & Marable, *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers*, 59-60.

<sup>14</sup> Medgar Evers to branch members, monthly report, June 23, 1958, Papers of the NAACP, Cook Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, part 27, series A, reel 10, frame 00094 (hereafter cited as NAACP Papers); Medgar Evers to

Yet, Professor Caryl Cooper points out that “African American opinion was not unified in Mississippi” during the 1950s.<sup>15</sup> Medgar Evers continued to face fierce opposition from both conservative members of Jackson’s Black community, particularly Jackson State University President Jacob Reddix and *Jackson Advocate* editor Percy Greene, and from segregationist officials. At a speaking engagement in California, NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers lamented that,

So often we find Negroes of means who could well afford to lead our people out of our present state but are nevertheless content with things as they are, because of the personal profit they receive from segregation and human misery. These people have been selected by Whites as leaders of the Negro communities in an effort to stamp out any semblance of our fight for justice and equality by the more militant Negro people. Many of these “Uncle Toms” are given high educational posts, such as principals, superintendents, and even college presidents, to bolster their community prestige. In the case of principals there seems to be a conspiracy, on the part of some state and county officials, to name all Negro schools that are now being built after the principal, to further his or her prestige in the community. A number of principals have assumed the role of community dictator to the extent that they have totally discouraged the formation of Parent-Teacher Associations to work with the schools. They have expelled students who expressed an opinion or action favorable to the Supreme Court Decision and in some cases, refused to permit student government to function in school because of the political training it would provide some of the more aggressive students, making them “incorrigible” to the brainwashing techniques to which the curriculum subscribes.<sup>16</sup>

When Amos Brown, the seventeen-year-old president of the West Jackson NAACP Youth Council and president of the Southeast region of Youth Councils, openly challenged his principal’s criticism of the NAACP at a national convention,

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branch members, monthly report, January 21, 1959, NAACP Papers, part 27, series A, reel 10, frame 00190; Medgar Evers to branch members, monthly report, April 11, 1958, NAACP Papers, part 27, series A, reel 10, frame 00065.

<sup>15</sup> Caryl A. Cooper, “Percy Greene and the *Jackson Advocate*,” in *The Press and Race: Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement*, ed. David R. Davies (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 65.

<sup>16</sup> Medgar Evers to state branches, June 22, 1959, NAACP Papers, part 27, series A, reel 10, frame 00239-00240.

Superintendent of Schools Kirby Walker called his mother into a meeting and demanded that she teach Brown to “obey his elders.” In another meeting, Principal Luther Marshall accused Brown of not respecting the administration and of influencing other students to disobey school and city officials. When Brown’s mother refused to transfer him to another school, Marshall expelled Brown and threatened to have him arrested if he attempted to attend class again.<sup>17</sup> Reddix similarly threatened, on a regular basis, to expel Jackson State students who violated social mores, which might prompt a White backlash. Professor Caryl A. Cooper suggests that Black educators had a “vested interest in maintaining the status quo” of segregation because it gave many of them a “certain amount of prestige” in the Black community and because they feared losing their jobs if schools integrated.<sup>18</sup>

If middle-class conservative Black Mississippians supported any changes to the status quo, they often called for a slower pace in attempting to do so. Editor of the *Jackson Advocate*, Percy Greene strongly supported and helped efforts to extend the franchise to American Americans but often ridiculed prominent civil rights leaders and those who engaged in nonviolent protests. Greene, who profited considerably from using his newspaper as a mouthpiece for segregationists, did not agree with coercing Whites to concede civil right gains because he remained confident that educated, upper-class Blacks and Whites could solve social problems by working together. He even lambasted the *Brown* decision because he, with justifiable concerns, worried that state leaders would abolish the state’s public education system rather than allow school integration.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Medgar Evers to Gloster Current, September 8, 1958, Ibid., frame 00121-00122

<sup>18</sup> Cooper, “Percy Greene and the *Jackson Advocate*,” 65.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 61-63, 66.

Conservative Black Mississippians, primarily educators and businessmen, tended to militate against civil rights activity because they hesitated to participate in or support activity that would probably elicit a White backlash and, often, to protect their own socioeconomic interests.

Mississippi's segregationist officials, meanwhile, remained vigilant in undermining civil rights activity. With ardent support from Governor James P. Coleman, the state legislature authorized in 1956 the formation of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, which served as a watchdog agency for civil rights activity. Together with conservative Black Mississippians like Percy Greene, Commission staff produced pamphlets and videos showcasing a positive image of race relations in the state, while its investigators compiled dossiers on suspected civil rights activists. In 1958, the state legislature authorized the Sovereignty Commission to investigate NAACP activity in Mississippi.<sup>20</sup>

Starting in February 1960, however, student-led protests in North Carolina bolstered the militancy of civil rights activity in the South. On February 1, 1960, a local eatery in Greensboro, North Carolina, refused to serve students Joseph McNeil, Izell Blair, Franklin McCain, and David Richmond. The young men remained in their seats, yet were not attacked. Over the following week, a growing number of fellow students joined them at the lunch counter, which increasingly disrupted business activity and ultimately forced the establishment into bankruptcy. Over the following weeks, sit-in demonstrations erupted in some thirty college towns across the Upper South including

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<sup>20</sup> Yasuhiro Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States' Rights* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 18; NAACP, news release, 1958, NAACP Papers, part 25, series D, reel 15, frame 00032.

Richmond, Winston-Salem, Nashville, Raleigh, and Chattanooga.<sup>21</sup> Attracted by their nonviolent approach, historians August Meier and Elliott Rudwick argued that CORE “rushed to give assistance and guidance to the new activists.”<sup>22</sup>

In the wake of these student-organized protests, Medgar Evers, inspired by the young demonstrators, informed the national NAACP office that “the unrest of young people throughout the southland and the nation has had its influence on the young people at Tougaloo College and Campbell College here in the Jackson area.”<sup>23</sup> With exuberant youth, Evers formed a NAACP Youth Council on the campus of Tougaloo. Furthermore, Black students from Tougaloo College and White students from Millsaps College secretly formed the Intercollegiate Fellowship Council in which young people discussed social and political issues, including integration, until White officials discovered them a few years later and forced the group to dissolve.<sup>24</sup> NAACP staff across the state, however, seemed divided over the possible outbreak of direct-action protests in Mississippi. Some officers, particularly Evers, accused the State Conference of “dragging its feet” and therefore losing members to the more active organizations, while state President C.R. Darden and others, fearing violent retaliation against demonstrators, indicated that “there were things far more important that the State Conference should

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<sup>21</sup> Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 10-11.

<sup>22</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 102.

<sup>23</sup> Medgar Evers to Gloster Current, March 9, 1960 as quoted in Evers-Williams & Marable, *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers*, 170.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Smith, interview by Harriet Tanzman, Tougaloo College, MS, April 8, 2000, transcript, Center for Oral History, McCain Library & Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, 261-62.

engage itself in, especially registration and voting.”<sup>25</sup> Darden further feared that “if members of our Youth Council were involved in protest movements of any sorts, hatred for the organization would be more pronounced than ever before.”<sup>26</sup>

If some state and national officials seemed hesitant to engage in nonviolent mass protest, more than 700 high school and college students in the Jackson area were not. During Easter week of 1960, area youth canvassed Jackson’s Black neighborhoods in an effort to convince community members to boycott the city’s downtown shopping district, where virtually every business had regularly discriminated against African Americans. Although local newspapers claimed that the boycott had “apparently fizzled out,” Medgar Evers announced that “the Sacrifice for Human Dignity boycott was gauged to [have enjoyed] eighty to ninety percent cooperation,” as Black-owned businesses in the area experienced a tremendous boom in business during the week of April 10 to April 16, 1960.<sup>27</sup> Although its success was probably overstated to impress the national office, the boycott enjoyed widespread support from Jackson’s Black community, even among conservatives, because participants risked little economic or physical reprisal for opting not to buy from discriminatory businesses. Like the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a community-enforced boycott represented a powerful protest strategy.

Meanwhile, building upon the upsurge in young militant activity across the South, SCLC executive director Ella Baker organized a conference in Raleigh, North

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<sup>25</sup> Medgar Evers to NAACP Jackson Branch, March 22, 1960, as quoted in Evers-Williams & Marable, *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers*, 175.

<sup>26</sup> Medgar Evers to Gloster Current, March 15, 1960, as quoted in Evers-Williams & Marable, *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers*, 173.

<sup>27</sup> Medgar Evers to NAACP State branches, monthly report, April 19, 1960, NAACP Papers, part 25, series D, reel 15, frame 00392; Medgar Evers to Ruby Hurley, April 19, 1960 as quoted in Evers-Williams & Marable, *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers*, 184.



Carolina, for southern sit-in leaders to discuss the future of sustained protest activities. During the April conference, participants formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) as a provisional, non-hierarchical, youth-led organization that challenged all forms of discrimination through nonviolent protest.<sup>28</sup> SNCC and CORE soon initiated a chain of events that broke NAACP hegemony in Mississippi. With its headquarters established in Atlanta, SNCC sent Bob Moses to visit the NAACP's Amzie Moore in Mississippi during July 1960 to discuss the problem of gripping poverty among African Americans. They ultimately concluded that securing meaningful voting rights represented the most effective strategy in resolving the social and economic plight of southern Blacks. Before Moses returned to Atlanta, the men sketched tentative plans for a voter registration campaign in Mississippi.

Dittmer suggests, however, that its national staff “wanted Mississippi to remain exclusive NAACP territory.”<sup>29</sup> He claims that national NAACP officers worried that the SCLC, SNCC and CORE would attract funding, membership, and national attention away from them. Yet, Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins assured SCLC's Martin Luther King that “I know you join me in the determination not to have a break between our groups [because] we seek the same goals and we have the same enemies.”<sup>30</sup> In addition, Mississippi NAACP officers, along with staff from the other organizations, recognized the possible advantages of cooperation, particularly the opportunity to face Governor Ross Barnett with a unified voice. Despite initial worries over possibly losing sole autonomy in the state, Medgar Evers organized the Council of Federated Organizations

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<sup>28</sup> Carson, *In Struggle*, 30.

<sup>29</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 77.

<sup>30</sup> Roy Wilkins to Martin Luther King, Jr., April 21, 1960, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 17, frame 00487.

(COFO) in the spring of 1961 as a means for the NAACP, CORE, SNCC, and SCLC collectively to discuss race issues with Mississippi Governor Barnett. Intrigued by this new entity, Barnett decided to meet with the group although he made no concessions. COFO disbanded after this one meeting but civil rights workers in Mississippi had taken tentative steps towards forging an allied challenge to segregation in the Magnolia State.<sup>31</sup>

Medgar Evers also capitalized on growing dissatisfaction in the Black community by demanding in February 1961, that city officials hire more Black police officers, traffic crossing guards, and sanitation workers; desegregate public transportation facilities; ensure unfettered access to public facilities and services; and integrate schools in compliance with the *Brown* decision. Nine students from Tougaloo College, however, did not wait for the state and national NAACP offices to dismantle segregation through courtroom litigation. On March 29, 1961, these students conducted the city's first sit-in demonstration at the Jackson Municipal Library and were summarily arrested. In response, several dozen student-led protests erupted in Jackson that evening and for several days afterward. Police beat several of the youth who demonstrated, while Jackson State University President Jacob Reddix threatened to expel any college student who participated. Despite threats, area students also protested the April 19 arrest of four young people who had attempted to integrate the Jackson bus lines. NAACP Youth

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<sup>31</sup> Evers with Peters, *For Us, the Living*, 253; Aaron Henry, interview by Neil McMillen and George Burson, Clarksdale, MS, May 1, 1972, transcript, Center for Oral History, McCain Library & Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, 41.

Council members even collected information about the bus company's owners and the number of riders each day to gauge the possible effect of a bus boycott.<sup>32</sup>

In May 1961, CORE and SNCC became integrally involved in the Jackson Movement. Testing southern compliance with the Supreme Court's December 1960 *Boynton v. Virginia* ruling, which prohibited the segregation of interstate terminal accommodations, an integrated group of thirteen CORE volunteers left Washington D. C. on May 4 in two separate buses destined for New Orleans. They agreed that, if arrested, members would remain in jail rather than pay fines or post bail. The riders successfully integrated bus stations in Virginia and North Carolina, but White mobs in South Carolina and then in Alabama brutally attacked them. On March 14, a White mob in Anniston, Alabama, waited for the Freedom Riders who arrived aboard a Greyhound bus. Whites in the mob immediately smashed many of the bus's windows and slashed its tires, but the riders were able, with police protection, to limp six miles outside of town until the tires went flat. The mob, however, surrounded again the bus and firebombed it, causing it to engulf in flame and smoke. The riders escaped death only because the mob, which had been holding the door shut, feared an imminent explosion and released their grip on the door to run away. Led by the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, a caravan of volunteers transported the beleaguered riders to Birmingham for medical treatment. That same day, Freedom Riders aboard the Trailways bus arrived in Birmingham into the hands of another waiting White mob. For fifteen minutes, vigilantes viciously beat the

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<sup>32</sup> Eric R. Burner, "And Gently He Shall Lead Them," *Robert Parris Moses and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 221-22; Ruby Magee, interview by Orley Caudill, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, May 18, 1972, transcript, Center for Oral History, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, 4; Gloster Current to Medgar Evers, April 24, 1961, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 15, frame 00528.

demonstrators with their fists and with pipes and left before police arrived. Because no bus driver seemed willing to drive the Freedom Riders to Montgomery, CORE abandoned the campaign on May 17 and flew its members to New Orleans.<sup>33</sup>

That same day, however, SNCC members from Nashville traveled south to Birmingham to continue the Freedom Ride. Quickly arrested and later that night driven back to the Tennessee border by Police Commissioner Eugene Conner, Diane Nash organized another ride back into Birmingham and, on May 20, successfully rode buses from Birmingham to Montgomery. Like their CORE counterparts, the newest Freedom Riders arrived to a waiting mob who brutally beat them, some nearly to death. After some recovery, the first group of twelve Freedom Riders left a Trailways bus station in Montgomery for Jackson, Mississippi, on May 23. Highway Patrol officers from Alabama, and later Mississippi, escorted CORE's Dave Dennis, Southern University students Julia Aaron and Jean Thompson, Morehouse College student Harold Andrews, NAG member Paul Dietrich, and SNCC's Nashville Movement veterans Jim Lawson, Jim Bevel, C.T. Vivian, Bernard Lafayette, Joseph Carter, Alex Anderson, and Matthew Walker, Jr. A second group of fifteen riders including Antioch College students Peter Ackerburg, Lucretia Collins and Doris Castle; Nashville Movement veterans John Lewis, Rip Patton, John Lee Copeland, Gady Donald, Clarence Thomas, and LeRoy Wright; Howard University students Hank Thomas, John Moody, and Dion Diamond; Frank Holloway of SNCC's Atlanta chapter; Jerome Smith of CORE's New Orleans branch; and CORE's Jim Farmer left from the Greyhound bus terminal. Police arrested all

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<sup>33</sup> Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 135-40; Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, 92-93.

twenty-seven demonstrators for breach of peace and for failure to obey a police officer when they arrived in Jackson later that day.<sup>34</sup>

Raymond Arsenault suggests that “many White Mississippians were uncomfortable with the state’s image as a lawless home of Negrophobic vigilantes” in the wake of the burgeoning Freedom Rides campaign.<sup>35</sup> Mississippi politicians therefore attempted to deflect criticism, suggests historian Keith Finley, “by labeling the demonstrators [as] dangerous insurgents bent on flouting state law.”<sup>36</sup> Governor Ross Barnett and the state legislature passed a flurry of new legislation designed to criminalize almost any protest action, loosely defined, taken by the Freedom Riders. Rather than allow White mobs to attack demonstrators openly, Jackson officials wanted to prosecute demonstrators as criminals and therefore give the federal government less reason to intervene on behalf of civil rights activists. The Kennedy administration, however, wanted only to prevent any violence against demonstrators rather than provide any meaningful assistance to them.

Historian Mary Dudziak argues convincingly that Cold War foreign policy concerns and political pressure from southerners in the Democratic Party pressured Kennedy to maintain a moderate civil rights agenda. In competing with the Soviet Union for spheres of influence, Kennedy sought to convey in his foreign policy dealings the appearance of meaningful assistance to civil rights activists, while assuring his southern political base that he, in fact, only accepted limited changes to the status quo. Therefore,

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<sup>34</sup> Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, 93-95; Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 184-88;

<sup>35</sup> Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 196.

<sup>36</sup> Keith M. Finley, *Delaying the Dream: Southern Senators and the Fight against Civil Rights, 1938-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 234.

Kennedy agreed to a behind-the-scenes “Mississippi Deal” with Senator James O. Eastland that if state officials protected the Freedom Riders from mob violence, Attorney General Robert Kennedy would not interfere with Mississippi’s efforts to arrest and prosecute the demonstrators. The Mississippi Deal proved to be a double-edged sword as state officials succeeded in keeping federal authorities out of their affairs dealing with the Freedom Riders, but the lack of violence against demonstrators encouraged new waves of activists to pour into the Magnolia State’s capital.<sup>37</sup>

Rejecting calls by the Kennedy administration to halt their demonstrations, however, national officers of SNCC, CORE, and SCLC declared their intention to expand the Freedom Ride campaign. Martin Luther King, Jr. organized the Freedom Ride Coordinating Committee (FRCC) in Atlanta, which included SCLC’s King and Bernard Lee, Gordon Carey of CORE, Ed King of SNCC, two preachers, and a delegate of the National Student Association. The group made plans to establish recruitment centers in several southern cities to organize additional Freedom Rides to Jackson. In addition, several SNCC members including Diane Nash, Lester McKinnie, Marion Berry, and Charles Sherrod, as well as other Freedom Riders paroled in following weeks, formed the Jackson Nonviolent Movement to help train community members in nonviolent protest and to explain voting procedures.<sup>38</sup>

Raymond Arsenault argues that “an impatient vanguard of young Americans had finally brought the struggle for racial liberation and democratic renewal to the one state

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<sup>37</sup> Erle Johnson, *I Rolled with Ross: A Political Portrait* (Baton Rouge: Moran, 1980), 15; Dittmer, *Local People*, 94; Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 156; Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, 99-100.

<sup>38</sup> Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 199-200, 242.

[Mississippi] widely considered beyond redemption.”<sup>39</sup> Yet, the Freedom Riders and members of the newly formed Jackson Nonviolent Movement actually reinforced Jackson’s mobilizing grassroots civil rights movement with additional personnel and national media attention. On May 26, another group of four individuals left Nashville for Jackson, stopping briefly in Montgomery, while a second group of nine Tennessee State University students left Nashville later that day, riding to Jackson via Memphis. Police arrested two groups of riders from Montgomery on June 2 and continued to arrest Freedom Riders as they arrived throughout June and July of 1961.<sup>40</sup> In the meantime, scores of Jackson youths attended nonviolent protests and voter registration workshops, which prompted an outbreak of direct-action protests throughout the summer. Authorities arrested numerous young people for attempting to desegregate various facilities throughout the city, including the local zoo. On June 23, Tougaloo students Mary Harrison, Joe Ross, Elnora Price, and Tom Armstrong entered a Trailways bus station and bought tickets to New Orleans before sitting together in the White section. Police subsequently arrested them.<sup>41</sup>

Away from prying media officials, police officers brutalized the civil rights workers in the city’s increasingly crowded prison facilities. To accommodate the growing number of arrested demonstrators, on May 29, police transported twenty-four Freedom Riders to the Hinds County penal farm, where guards beat and confined them to their cramped cells. By June 12, city and county jails were filled, so demonstrators were sent to Parchman Penitentiary. The first group of forty-five men, twenty-nine Black and

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 202-03, 211.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 229.

sixteen White, arrived on June 15 and were immediately forced to strip nude and shave off all facial hair. In order to further demean the men, they were kept nude in holding cells with other prisoners before being locked away in isolation for most of each day. Prison officials wanted to reinforce the power dynamics of the state by attempting to demean the men and leave them powerless.<sup>42</sup>

According to Dittmer, in response to the growing wave of direct-action protests associated with the Freedom Ride campaign Jackson's "relatively large Black middle class, composed mainly of teachers, ministers, and a small but influential group of entrepreneurs, felt threatened by the Jackson Nonviolent Movement and wanted no part of the politics of confrontation."<sup>43</sup> A selective buying campaign seemed relatively harmless, but conservative members of Jackson's Black community, including Percy Greene and businessman R.L.T. Smith, were largely hesitant to support direct-action protests that might elicit economic or vigilante reprisals against participants. Yet, several upper class Black women joined the group Womanpower Unlimited to help provide monetary and moral support for jailed protesters. Organized by businesswoman Claire Collins Harvey on May 29, the initial group of twenty Black women, most of whom were in their forties and fifties and financially secure, raised funds and gathered supplies to properly feed, clothe, and house demonstrators when released on bond. Even after most Freedom Riders left Jackson by the summer's end, Womanpower Unlimited, which eventually grew to over three hundred White and Black members, continued to organize

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 202-04, 223-25.

<sup>43</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 117.



massive food drives to help feed civil rights workers and to coordinate housing arrangements for them.<sup>44</sup>

Medgar Evers criticized SNCC and CORE for their “hastily gotten together workshops” and reported to the NAACP’s national office that demonstrators asked the NAACP branch to pay for jail bonds.<sup>45</sup> The national staff disliked spending its own funds to assist projects over which it exercised little control, but the NAACP Legal Defense Team nonetheless supplied the bulk of bail money for demonstrators because members recognized the importance of sustained struggle against Mississippi’s segregationist power structure. In addition, the NAACP national office filed for an injunction against the city of Jackson, its police department, and the state of Mississippi in an attempt to bar them from arresting individuals who attempted to use intrastate and interstate travel facilities, including restaurants and the local airport. On July 11, the Justice Department joined the NAACP’s lawsuit to bar city and state officials from arresting Freedom Riders. Two months later, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued regulations barring separate facilities in transportation terminals, effective November 1.<sup>46</sup>

By the end of the summer, authorities had arrested and released on bond more than three hundred Freedom Riders and local youth protesters. Most non-natives went home, but Arsenault noted that “the dozen or so who remained were part of a growing

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<sup>44</sup> Vicki Lynn Crawford, “‘We Shall Not Be Moved’; Black Female Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement, 1960-1965,” PhD diss., Emory University, 1987, 33-39.

<sup>45</sup> Medgar Evers to Roy Wilkins, Gloster Current, and Ruby Hurley, October 12, 1961, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 15, frames 00564 & 00567.

<sup>46</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 142-43; Medgar Evers to branch members, monthly report, June 21, 1961, NAACP Papers, reel 15, frame 0120; Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 240; Carson, *In Struggle*, 36.

movement presence in Mississippi.”<sup>47</sup> As the young people of Jackson took an increasingly active role in pressuring the city’s power structure, several SNCC and CORE staff had decided to help organize projects in other parts of the state, particularly in the city of McComb, while a small but vital group under the direction of CORE’s David Dennis remained in Jackson to continue assisting community-driven protests. NAACP Youth Council members organized a widely supported boycott of the annual state fair held in October and another boycott against downtown merchants during the 1961 Christmas season. By December, McComb’s Black community, which had experienced several violent reprisals, asked SNCC and CORE staff to leave town. Most went to the Delta to plan operations for the next year, while SNCC’s Bob Moses canvassed the state to recruit new members.<sup>48</sup>

In January 1962, the momentum of civil rights activism escalated throughout the state as the Jackson Movement intensified voter registration activity while SNCC and CORE staff mobilized civil rights projects in other Mississippi communities. The national office of the NAACP lodged a federal lawsuit against the city of Jackson to desegregate all public recreational facilities in Mississippi’s capital while students from Campbell College, Tougaloo College, and even a few from Jackson State University canvassed Black neighborhoods in late January urging citizens to pay their poll tax and to register to vote. Womanpower Unlimited began holding weekly voter registration workshops and a few months later opened an office that allowed individuals, most of

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<sup>47</sup> Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 289.

<sup>48</sup> Evers, *For Us, the Living*, 235-37; Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 50, 65-68; Medgar Evers to Jackson branch members, September 6, 1961, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 15, frame 00551; “Jackson Negroes Asked: ‘Stay Off Capitol Street,’” December 16, 1961, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 2.

whom were unable to leave their jobs during the workday, to pay their poll tax outside of working hours; SNCC's James Bevel, Diane Nash, and Lester McKinnie formed a nonviolent movement in Laurel and began leading workshops on nonviolent protest in both cities. By late February, several students in Laurel had participated in sit-in demonstrations and were planning a boycott of downtown merchants. Despite continued hesitation by adults, students in Laurel distributed leaflets urging Black members of the community to boycott downtown merchants.<sup>49</sup>

In February 1962, activists in Mississippi decided to address the "bureaucratic wrangling and turf wars among the various organizations" that might undermine the future effectiveness of protest activity.<sup>50</sup> After discussion, SNCC's Bob Moses, CORE's Tom Gaither, and NAACP's Aaron Henry and Medgar Evers agreed to revive the COFO alliance. Aaron Henry would serve as president, while Bob Moses became program director and CORE's Dave Dennis his assistant. Utilizing funds from the Voter Education Project (VEP), COFO planned to focus its efforts primarily on helping Black Mississippians secure their right to vote.<sup>51</sup> Dittmer suggests that "movement activity continued throughout the spring and early summer of 1962, with mixed results."<sup>52</sup> Direct-action protests did not force White authorities to concede anything, but they nonetheless signified Black Mississippians' continued dissatisfaction with the status quo

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<sup>49</sup> "NAACP Files Suit to Desegregate Recreational Facilities in Jackson," January 20, 1962, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 2; SNCC, "An Autobiographical Sketch [of Lester McKinnie]," undated, SNCC Papers, reel 7, A=IV=228, frame 0876; Lester McKinnie to Jim Forman, January 26, 1962, SNCC Papers, reel 7, A=IV=228, frame 0845; Crawford, "'We Shall Not Be Moved,'" 40-41; Lester McKinnie to Jim Forman, February 24, 1962, SNCC Papers, reel 7, A=IV=228, frame 0843; Lester McKinnie to Jim Forman, April 15, 1962, SNCC Papers, reel 7, A=IV=228, frame 0849.

<sup>50</sup> Burner, "*And Gently He Shall Lead Them*," 77.

<sup>51</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 118-19.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

and a willingness to challenge it. With the umbrella alliance in place, members of Jackson's Black community and COFO staff stood ready to expand civil rights activism into the summer and fall of 1962.

In late April, Jackson Movement personnel boycotted the city's bus line after officials ignored demands to end discrimination in seating arrangements. To help provide for alternative transportation, SNCC's Lester McKinnie successfully made a deal with area taxis to charge half their normal rate, which was equivalent to a normal bus fare. Meanwhile, national NAACP officers urged all Mississippi branches to negotiate with local businesses and insist that they end discriminatory practices in employment. If employers refused, local branch leaders were to organize a boycott against them. In early August, parents of nine Jackson students filed petitions with the local school board to integrate schools, but were ignored.<sup>53</sup> By early fall, a Tougaloo professor admitted that "the young people in the Black community in Jackson, even though still afraid in most cases, had been stirred in such a way that a great many were now interested in doing something for civil rights."<sup>54</sup>

Also by early fall, several SNCC staff had left Mississippi's capital for the infamous Delta. Dittmer claims that these organizers had concluded that "Jackson was not yet ready for a campaign centered on militant protest," but historian Charles Payne clarifies that SNCC had received five thousand dollars of VEP funds and, with the

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<sup>53</sup> Lester McKinnie to Jim Forman, March 9, 1962, SNCC Papers, reel 7, A=IV=228, frame 0846-0847; "Negroes Boycott Jackson City Buses," May 5, 1962, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 3; "NAACP Steps Up Drive for Jobs," May 5, 1962, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 3; Medgar Evers to Robert Carter, December 14, 1962, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 10, frame 00383.

<sup>54</sup> John Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi: An American Chronicle of Struggle and Schism* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1979), 48.

money, “went ahead with their plans for an enlarged voter registration drive” in several Delta counties.<sup>55</sup> In addition, historian Clayborne Carson argues convincingly that “throughout its history SNCC continued to support the notion that local community groups should determine their own direction.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, the SNCC members who moved into the Delta did not abandon the Jackson Movement, but rather reinforced the organization’s commitment to fostering community-led uplift. Jackson’s Black youth now prepared to mobilize the entire Black community to challenge segregation.

Similar to the previous year, Jackson youths canvassed Black neighborhoods calling for individuals to boycott the city’s segregated state fair. Tougaloo student Anne Moody remembered that one evening after several students had picketed the 1962 Jackson state fair, “it seemed as though every girl in the dorm was down in the lounge in front of the set [and] were all shooting off about how they would take part in the next demonstration.”<sup>57</sup> When that day’s picketers had arrived on campus, freshly bailed from jail, students launched a massive rally that lasted until twelve-thirty, and “by this time all the students were ready to tear Jackson to pieces.”<sup>58</sup> On November 7, 1962, Evers praised the fact that the boycott proved about 90-95% effective in reducing revenues earned, which again was probably an overestimation, and furthermore declared that “we shall ask Negro Citizens to boycott the fair each year, so long as it is segregated.”<sup>59</sup>

Young people in Jackson again organized a boycott against downtown merchants in December. Unlike the previous year, however, Jackson Movement personnel agreed

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<sup>55</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 124; Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 141.

<sup>56</sup> Carson, *In Struggle*, 30.

<sup>57</sup> Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, (New York: Dell, 1968), 270.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>59</sup> Medgar Evers to branch members, November 7, 1962, as quoted in Evers-Williams & Marable, *the Autobiography of Medgar Evers*, 263.

to sustain the boycott until city officials conceded to their demands. Although conservative members of the Black community remained hesitant to participate in direct-action demonstrations, their compliance with NAACP-organized boycotts between 1960 and 1962 proved invaluable to the burgeoning grassroots struggle. Furthermore, now allied with SNCC, CORE, and SCLC staff including Dave Dennis, Lester McKinnie, and Bernard Lafayette, movement participants over the course of 1963 increasingly pulled community members, even conservatives, into the streets and the county registrar's office to challenge institutionalized discrimination.

## CHAPTER III

## RISING TIDE OF PROTEST: THE JACKSON MOVEMENT ESCALATES

We live in a white man's world almost like slaves again, but we can't let  
this go on any longer...we must fight.  
—Betty Booker, student at Jim Hill High School

Young Black community members of Jackson, Mississippi, and adult members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) initiated in 1955 a viable civil rights movement in the Magnolia State's capital, but staff from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Conference of Racial Equality (CORE) broadened the freedom struggle by 1961. By December 1962, movement personnel collectively organized a powerful boycott against discriminatory downtown businesses and mobilized Jackson's Black community for sustained protest activity over the course of 1963. Despite token concessions by White officials and reluctance among some Black conservatives, militant activists sustained direct-action protests against the city while NAACP, CORE, SNCC, and SCLC staff across Mississippi, including those working with the Jackson Movement, reorganized the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) in February 1962 to mobilize a state-wide political challenge to Mississippi's segregationist power structure.

After a fourteen-month investigation into 150 complaints of civil rights violations, the Mississippi Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported in January 1963 that "only too rarely have we seen any indication that the state is eager or even willing to punish those who, in its name, [terrorize] the innocent and the

defenseless.”<sup>1</sup> The committee cited several instances in which White leaders attempted to undermine its investigation by intimidating witnesses and urging other state officials not to comply with questioning. The Advisory Committee concluded that Mississippi’s government blatantly violated the constitutional rights of its Black citizens and furthermore admonished the federal government for its failure to ensure equal protection under the law. Committee members finished their report by demanding that President John F. Kennedy direct the Justice Department to launch criminal proceedings against violators of federal civil rights laws and called upon Congress to pass legislation that better protected the civil rights of all Americans.<sup>2</sup>

Continued instances of discrimination in Jackson and across Mississippi prompted civil rights activists to escalate protest activity starting in December 1962. Building on the success of previous boycotts, NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers, Tougaloo Professor John Salter, and President of the North Jackson NAACP Youth Council Colia Liddell decided to boycott, yet again, downtown Jackson merchants during the 1962 Christmas shopping season, claiming they would sustain the protest “until Negro shoppers are shown more respect and permitted to work at more than menial labor.”<sup>3</sup> The boycott campaign began when, on the morning of December 19, thirty city police officers arrested John Salter, his wife, and four students for picketing the Woolworth store on

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<sup>1</sup> Mississippi Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, report, “Administration of Justice in Mississippi,” January 1963, transcript, Center for Oral History, McCain Library & Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 3, 23-26.

<sup>3</sup> “6 Pickets Arrested on Capitol Street; Initiate Boycott...,” *Mississippi Free Press*, December 22, 1962, Komisar (Lucy) Civil Rights Collection, box 1, folder 3, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi (hereafter cited as MFP Komisar Collection).



Capitol Street. Ten days later, police also arrested Tougaloo students Dorie Ladner and Charles Milton Bracey for picketing.<sup>4</sup> Evers acknowledged that “leading the selected buying campaign were members of our North Jackson Youth Council and Tougaloo College Chapter of NAACP,” who distributed leaflets around the city, spoke at churches, and canvassed by phone Black community members, urging them to comply with the boycott.<sup>5</sup>

By the end of 1962, the boycott had targeted 127 White-owned businesses including Bagby Hall Motors, Jitney Jungle grocery stores, McRae’s Department Stores, Wilkinson’s 555 Tire and Appliance Stores, and Star Super Markets throughout the city, as well as all businesses on Capitol Street from State Street to Mills Street. Volunteers continued to canvass Jackson’s Black neighborhoods throughout the spring of 1963, distributing more than 47,000 leaflets that urged continuing boycott compliance during the upcoming Easter shopping season. Growing retaliation against voter registration projects in the Delta, however, prompted movement personnel from around Mississippi, including Jackson, to reinforce, whenever possible, COFO’s presence in the dangerous northwestern part of the state.<sup>6</sup>

After leaving Jackson in February to tour Delta communities, SNCC’s Bob Moses, Tougaloo student Jimmy Travis, and Voter Education Project (VEP) field director Randolph Blackwell quickly realized that Greenwood, Mississippi, located in Leflore

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<sup>4</sup> “More Pickets Jailed as Capitol St. Boycott Continues in Jackson,” December 29, 1962, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>5</sup> Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi: An American Chronicle of Struggle and Schism* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1979), 268.

<sup>6</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 158-59; Jackson Boycott Movement, boycott leaflet, spring 1963, Papers of SNCC, reel 38, A:XV:133, frame 0633, Cook Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS (hereafter cited as SNCC Papers).

County, most urgently needed assistance. In retaliation for voter registration attempts by several Black residents, the Leflore County Board of Supervisors in October 1962 claimed that distributing surplus federal foodstuffs to the area's impoverished residents proved too costly and voted to shut down the program. Of this incident, sociologist Charles Payne wrote that the county's decision only further convinced SNCC members Hollis Watkins, Sam Block, Willie Peacock, and Lawrence Guyot of the Greenwood COFO project that a connection existed between exclusion from the political process and poverty. Over the winter, northern liberals, civic groups, and churches donated food and medicine, which Mississippi staff such SNCC's Ivanhoe Donaldson and Ben Taylor, as well as the NAACP's Medgar Evers, delivered to the beleaguered community, particularly to those punished for attempting to register. In March, the NAACP's Amzie Moore, CORE's Dave Dennis, SCLC's Annelle Ponder and Bernice Robinson, and SNCC's Frank Smith, who additionally continued his work in Holly Springs, joined Greenwood's staff.<sup>7</sup> The decision to cut surplus foodstuffs to impoverished Black Mississippians illustrates the tenacity of White officials in their attempts to undermine the freedom struggle. Yet, the incident also demonstrates the flexibility that activists exhibited in overcoming obstacles to the broader Mississippi Movement.

Encouraged by a growing number of attempts by Black Greenwood residents to register during the spring of 1963, Jackson Movement staff organized more workshops to educate the public about the registration process and frequently canvassed homes in the Black community, urging citizens to attend. For those who desired to register, volunteers drove them to the courthouse or helped care for their children while they ventured to the

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 156-60.

court house on their own. The *Mississippi Free Press*, an alternative weekly newspaper started in September 1961 by liberal White Mississippi lawyer Willigam Higgs and conservative Black Jackson native Reverend Robert L.T. Smith, even printed copies of the voting application in each of its weekly issues in an effort to help educate the public about the registration process. To better coordinate voter registration work and direct-action protests in the capital, Jackson businessmen I.S. Sanders and Sam Bailey, Rev. R.L.T. Smith and other ministers, such as Dean Charles Jones of Campbell College and Edwin King of Tougaloo College, along with activists John Salter, Medgar Evers, NAACP Youth Council President Pearlina Lewis, and CORE's Dave Dennis formed a strategy committee in early May, while a separate group of fifty prominent, middle-class Black community members formed the Citizens' Committee for Human Rights to encourage greater grassroots community support for the Jackson Movement. These two groups agreed to meet regularly at a Masonic Temple lodge on Lynch Street, the heart of Jackson's Black community. With a formalized leadership structure in place, the NAACP State Conference of Branches voted unanimously to expand direct-action protest activity in Jackson.<sup>8</sup>

While movement staff facilitated greater voter registration and picketing activity during spring 1963, Jackson's White community exhibited mixed reactions. Ardent segregationists wasted little time in falsely charging and convicting civil rights lawyer William Higgs with contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Higgs had assisted with

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 158; Dittmer, *Local People*, 148, 160-61; North Jackson NAACP Youth Council, bulletin "North Jackson Action," April 15, 1963, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:133, frame 0631; Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi*, 110-13; NAACP, special bulletin, May 13, 1963, Papers of the NAACP, Part 27, series A, reel 10, frame 00418, Cook Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS (hereafter cited as NAACP Papers).

most picketing cases in Jackson. Fined five hundred dollars and sentenced to six months in jail, Higgs fled the state. In March, unidentified Whites fired shots into the NAACP's Jackson office, which garnered little attention from police. Mayor Allen Thompson, meanwhile, directed city police to canvass downtown Jackson constantly, arresting almost all picketers, such as Tougaloo students Arverna Adams, Jimmy Armstrong, Frank Dickey, and Austin Moore III, all Mississippi natives, on charges of obstructing a sidewalk or for resisting arrest.<sup>9</sup> Several middle-class White women even joined a civic organization known as the Women for Constitutional Government, which provided refreshments for police officers on duty and publically labeled critics of Mayor Allen Thompson and Governor Ross Barnett as communists.<sup>10</sup> Although Black Mississippians and their White allies mobilized a viable civil rights movement in the capital, the state's power structure pushed back with a variety of tactics. White authorities ardently sought to undercut movement activity whenever possible while showing little concern for vigilante retaliation against activists illustrating, once again, that Black Mississippians and their allies did not enjoy equal protection under the law in the Magnolia State.

On the other hand, despite possible legal, economic, or vigilante retaliation, some Whites in Jackson criticized hard-line segregationists. Historian David Chappell suggests that White southerners who openly supported the movement were a small minority, but

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<sup>9</sup> North Jackson NAACP Youth Council, bulletin "North Jackson Action," April 15, 1963, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:133, frame 0631; "Higgs Found Guilty," February 23, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; "Gunshots Aimed at Door of Jackson Masonic Hall," March 23, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>10</sup> Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi*, 197; George Rogers, interview by Orley Caudill, Jackson, MS, November 16, 1977, transcript, Center for Oral History, McCain Library, Hattiesburg, MS, 26.

“they saw themselves as defending, not attacking, the best of southern tradition.”<sup>11</sup> While most White ministers in Mississippi were avowed segregationists, Dr. W.B. Selah of Galloway Memorial Methodist Church in Jackson called publicly for city schools to desegregate. Later, Selah and Rev. Jerry Furr, also of Galloway Methodist Church, resigned in protest when ushers turned away integrated groups of worshipers from their church.<sup>12</sup> The editors of the *Mississippi Free Press*, some of whom were White native Mississippians, wrote scathing editorials regularly, arguing at one point that “we cannot continue to elect to office politicians who think they can carry public favor by advocating defiance of constituted authority, disrespect for their government and open defiance of the law.”<sup>13</sup> They furthermore pleaded to the public that:

We know that people are not born to hate. It is not natural for Negroes and Whites to hate and fear each other. By making people who disagree afraid to oppose them, the racists have created a climate of ignorance and fear in Mississippi. One legislator said that they didn't always want to go along with the segregationist measures—often they were stupid laws—but they were afraid not to. Our problems are made more serious by the fact that people are afraid to speak out with solutions—afraid of the conservatives and racists who control public opinion.<sup>14</sup>

Strategy committee member John Salter remembered that he and other movement staff met White residents of Jackson “who subscribed to the essence of what Medgar [Evers and other movement leaders] had to say, but remained silent, choked by the same

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<sup>11</sup> David Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), xxi-xxii.

<sup>12</sup> “Jackson Minister Says Segregation Is Wrong,” January 5, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; “Minister Decries Segregation,” November 2, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>13</sup> “States’ Rights, Responsibilities,” March 9, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>14</sup> “Fear Prevents Progress,” January 19, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4.

mantle of fear that so long strangled their community and state.”<sup>15</sup> For example, activists spoke with White pastors and parishioners who admitted their support for integrated church services but refused to say so publicly due to possible retaliation from the White Citizens’ Council. Although many dissenters remained silent, some covertly provided valuable funding, legal advice, and news about current sentiments among Jackson’s White citizens. While media outlets assured the public that boycott activity made little impact on downtown trade, unidentified White clergymen informed movement officials that businessmen complained regularly about plummeting profits in the wake of the Jackson boycott. Prolonged sales advertisements and an offer from the mayor to lower property taxes indicated that many White-owned businesses were indeed affected negatively. Jackson Movement staff monitored the situation with interest, particularly since boycott activity organized by Montgomery, Alabama’s Black community in 1956 had economically crippled White business leaders, who then helped pressure city officials to end discrimination on public transportation.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, the Jackson Movement escalated intensely in the middle of May 1963. Until then, the NAACP’s national office had allowed its Jackson Branch considerable autonomy over local policy decisions, preferring instead to monitor events from New York City and, when called upon, to provide the necessary bail bonds and litigation for arrested protestors. On May 15, however, national NAACP officers arrived in Jackson to announce additional demonstrations and to bail out recently arrested demonstrators.<sup>17</sup> Dittmer argued correctly that “the reason for this sudden shift in policy

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<sup>15</sup> Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi*, 121.

<sup>16</sup> Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi*, 92; Chappell, *Inside Agitators*, xv-xvi.

<sup>17</sup> Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi*, 151-53.

[the direct involvement of national staff] was, in a word, Birmingham.”<sup>18</sup> Invited by Rev. Fred Lee Shuttlesworth of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, SCLC’s Martin Luther King Jr. and members of Birmingham’s Black community demanded in April 1963 that city officials desegregate public facilities, end discriminatory employment practices, and form a bi-racial committee to hear grievances from Black citizens. When White officials refused, thousands of grassroots protesters poured into Birmingham’s streets during the first days of May. They were met by Police Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor and city police who viciously beat and arrested over one thousand peaceful protesters, including women and children. Distraught by the negative media attention surrounding police brutality, Birmingham’s Senior Citizens’ Committee, representing the city’s Chamber of Commerce, agreed on May 10 to implement movement demands according to an established timetable.<sup>19</sup>

Dittmer claims that the NAACP’s national office intervened in Jackson because it feared the prospect of SCLC’s newfound fame gained through its protest activity in Birmingham overshadowing its own efforts in Mississippi. Indeed, after Birmingham capitulated, NAACP, CORE, SCLC, and SNCC national offices increasingly competed with each other for funding, media attention, new recruits, and moral support from White liberals and from the Black communities in which movement staff lived and worked.<sup>20</sup> Yet, more important than any potential advantage one organization could garner over the others, Jackson Movement activists and national NAACP officers realized that “if such a bastion of segregation [Birmingham] could be defeated, then any other city or area [like

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<sup>18</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 160.

<sup>19</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992, revised ed.* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 118-33.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-37.

Jackson] could be brought to heel by an aroused Black community,” particularly one with additional personnel and funding.<sup>21</sup>

The strategy committee in Jackson, now augmented by national NAACP staff, immediately appointed community members to a negotiation committee, which would meet with city officials and White business leaders to reiterate original movement demands. Between May 21 and May 27, both sides discussed the prospect of hiring Black police officers and crossing guards, enacting fair employment practices, desegregating local schools and public facilities, and organizing a bi-racial committee to hear grievances of Jackson’s Black community. During negotiations, several White businessmen voiced concerns over the possible impact of continued disorder and possible violence.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the week, Mayor Allen Thompson finally capitulated to the demands in front of the negotiation committee, but “before the movement could celebrate, Thompson, who was probably being pushed from different sides, recanted.”<sup>23</sup> This sudden reversal certainly illustrates how White leaders were typically beholden to the whims of hard-line segregationists such as those of the White Citizens’ Council.

Confident that well-publicized demonstrations would force White officials in Jackson to accept movement demands, a group of students on May 28 began picketing in front of the downtown J.C. Penny’s to distract police while students Anne Moody, Pearlina Lewis, and Memphis Norman sat down to demand service from Woolworth’s lunch counter. Individuals already at the counter quickly slipped away in fear of imminent violence. Although initially dismissive of their action, angry Whites soon

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>22</sup> Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi*, 122-24; “Council Demands Responsible Talks,” May 25, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>23</sup> Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 286.



formed a mob and began taunting the demonstrators, calling them communists. An unidentified White man slapped Moody, threw Norman on the ground and nearly stomped him to death before police arrested both him and the assailant. Over the next two hours, the mob, joined by local high school students, insulted, beat, and poured condiments over the demonstrators who were joined by former Freedom Rider and White Tougaloo student Joan Trumpauer from Arlington, Virginia, CORE's George Raymond, and Tougaloo faculty Lois Chaffe and John Salter. An unidentified individual struck Salter in the face with brass knuckles and hit the back of his head with a heavy object, nearly knocking him unconscious, before someone else splashed peppered water into Salter's eyes. Police and media officials just stood by observing. After having been beaten, ridiculed, and otherwise "taught a lesson," Moody and the others were allowed to leave by police and the White mob.<sup>24</sup>

After the indignity protestors had suffered during the Woolworth sit-tin, Moody suggested that Jackson quickly became "the hotbed of racial demonstrations in the South" with mass rallies held nearly every night.<sup>25</sup> In schools throughout the city, students, who became increasingly impatient with the conservatism of so-called "uncle tom" educators, repeatedly walked out of school to protest continued segregation. As demonstrations grew in intensity, Moody remembered, "it seemed as though most of the Negro college and high school students there were making preparations to participate [and] those who did not go to jail were considered cowards by those who did."<sup>26</sup> Even adult members of the community mobilized to assist protest activity. Womanpower Unlimited, an

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<sup>24</sup> Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, (New York: Dell, 1968), 286-90; Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi*, 132-36.

<sup>25</sup> Moody, *Coming of Age*, 300.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

integrated group of primarily middle-class women who “sought to appeal to women’s moral and religious beliefs and encouraged [White and Black women] to take an active stance against racism,” grew to over 300 members by 1963 and began holding interfaith prayer fellowship meetings twice a month to discuss race issues.<sup>27</sup> These women actively encouraged other community members to donate money, give encouraging moral support to young demonstrators, drive them to picketing areas, and bail them from jail. Most of Jackson’s Black community had mobilized into a major grassroots civil rights movement and, with outside activists, prepared to force the city to its knees.

Yet, protest activity remained dangerous, as demonstrators routinely experienced instances of personal hardship and segregationist retaliation. Many student activists found it increasingly difficult to stay in or do well in school. Anne Moody admitted, “I had become so wrapped up in the Movement that by the time mid-semester grades came out I had barely a one-point average, [while] other students who had gotten involved with the NAACP were actually flunking.”<sup>28</sup> Adults faced the greater threat of economic retaliation, as they were more likely to be working full time and trying to raise a family. Families with low-paying jobs could hardly afford to lose a paycheck if one parent or both lost their jobs for openly demonstrating or supporting demonstrations. In addition, police continued to arrest and beat demonstrators, including women, children, and some bystanders. Testimony given before the Mississippi Civil Rights Advisory Board reveals that Jackson police beat and falsely charged James Wilson Jones with resisting arrest

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<sup>27</sup> Vicki Lynn Crawford, “‘We Shall Not Be Moved’;” Black Female Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement, 1960-1965,” PhD diss, Emory University, 1967, 44.

<sup>28</sup> Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 271.

only for watching a mass march proceed past his front porch.<sup>29</sup> The Jackson Movement carried great risks to the entire Black community. Individuals involved with protest activity still faced the threat of economic reprisal, arrest, or vigilante violence while any Black Mississippian in the city could fall victim to indiscriminate intimidation or violence.

Charles Payne noted in his masterful *I've Got the Light of Freedom* that even with the Black community of Jackson, Mississippi, mobilized for sustained protest, national NAACP officers and some of the more conservative members of Jackson's Black community increasingly worried about the vast amount of money tied up in bail bonds and the "possibility that demonstrations would get out of hand," resulting in unprecedented bloodshed.<sup>30</sup> Historian John Dittmer argued that "although [NAACP Executive Director Roy] Wilkins and his New York staff ostensibly came to town to offer assistance, they quickly took over planning and strategy" and forged an alliance with conservative Blacks, namely I.S. Sanders and R.L.T. Smith on the strategy committee and the prominent businessman of the Citizens' Committee for Human Rights, in Jackson by early June "to apply the brakes to demonstrations."<sup>31</sup> Inviting additional conservative clergy members to join the strategy committee, NAACP Director of Branches Gloster Current declared that direct-action protests would taper off while the committee intensified boycott activity, lodged additional litigation against the city, and shifted

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<sup>29</sup> James Wilson Jones, affidavit, June 1963, Hinds County, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:125, frame 0577.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 287.

<sup>31</sup> John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: the University of Illinois Press, 1995), 164; John Dittmer, *The Good Doctors: The Medical Committee for Human Rights and the Struggle for Social Justice in Health Care* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 15.

overall movement activity in Jackson towards another voter registration campaign. Most members of the strategy committee were confident that they could force city officials to concede, while minimizing violence and expensive bail bonds. John Salter, militant youth in the community, and other COFO staff, however, believed that Jackson's White leaders would never negotiate in good faith and called for continued demonstrations.<sup>32</sup>

News circulated around town over the next few days that picketing and sit-in demonstrations were supposedly coming to an end, and on June 6 Jackson officials secured an injunction against movement officials which barred public demonstrations. Nonetheless, the following day police arrested twenty-six youth in downtown for protesting against the injunction, and on June 9, about two dozen young people attempted to worship at local churches. Except for the Catholic Church, laymen at other White churches turned demonstrators away. Most NAACP staff dismissed calls for a mass march or, like Medgar Evers, remained silent. Meanwhile, members of the strategy committee faced growing threats of retaliation. Unidentified Whites drove past Tougaloo's campus nearly every night, yelling threats and obscenities, while Medgar Evers and John Salter received harassing phone calls. Salter sent his wife and young daughter to Minnesota. Evers, who had a Molotov cocktail thrown into his carport on May 29, admitted to his wife that his death seemed imminent. Jackson buzzed with uncertainty about the future of demonstrations until a single bullet in the early morning hours of June 12, 1963, brought the city to silence, if only for a few hours. Byron De La Beckwith, an ardent segregationist, hid in some bushes across the street from Medgar

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<sup>32</sup> Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi*, 113, 164-67; Dittmer, *Local People*, 164-65.

Evers's home and shot him in the back as he emerged from his car. Evers bled to death within an hour.<sup>33</sup>

In the hours and days following Evers's murder, Jackson's Black community exploded in a torrent of angry protest. Early that morning, a group of fourteen ministers including Rev. Haughton of Pearl Street Church and Campbell College chaplain Rev. Charles Jones were arrested after walking two blocks down Lynch Street in the heart of the Black community. The murder of Evers had prompted even some conservative clergy, many of whom had previously refused to march, to express their dissatisfaction with blatant abuses by segregationists. Colia Liddell, now married to SNCC's Bernard Lafayette and working with a project in Selma, Alabama, happened to be visiting that day and immediately helped Salter organize another protest march. Two hundred marchers, about evenly split between adults and Tougaloo students and community youths, similarly stepped out onto Lynch Street but were met by 150 police. Armed with batons and rifles, they beat, arrested, and then stuffed 150 into waiting paddy wagons and empty garbage trucks before transporting them to the Jackson fairgrounds stockade. Police spotted Salter and Ed King but refused to arrest them, preferring instead to stare menacingly at them for a minute before leaving.<sup>34</sup> White Mississippi officials often refused to believe that African Americans were willing and capable of demonstrating on their own terms. Instead, segregationists typically perceived that outside, White agitators were somehow responsible for inciting Black Mississippians to protest. Police, therefore, probably assumed that Salter and King had used the Black demonstrators as "pawns" to

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<sup>33</sup> Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi*, 172-80.

<sup>34</sup> Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi*, 186-96; Moody, *Coming of Age*, 293.

achieve whatever insidious goals they had and so officers chose to project the might of Jackson's police force and intimidate them.

Meanwhile, the NAACP's Anne Moody and SNCC's Dorie Ladner ran onto the campus of Jackson State University calling for students to join a protest march slated to start at Pearl Street AME church. Although President Jacob Reddix ran the activists off campus that morning, dozens of students showed up later to march. Singing Freedom Songs and carrying small American flags, marchers were intercepted by some 200 police on Rose Street, still in the Black section of town. Police pulled their flags away and threw them on the ground, beating anyone who resisted. Like those arrested earlier, the marchers were denied healthcare and taken to the Jackson fairgrounds and left for several days. Militant activists immediately began planning for a massive demonstration after the funeral of Medgar Evers.<sup>35</sup> Despite pressure from the national NAACP and conservative members on the strategy committee to slow the pace of nonviolent protest, thousands of Black community members ignored them and demonstrated anyway. The strategy committee helped to guide protest activity in Jackson, but the Black community itself exercised agency over the freedom struggle in Mississippi's capital.

On June 15, 1963, about four thousand men, women, and children, including well-known movement leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., along Jackson's militant youth like Moody and Ladner attended the funeral service for Medgar Evers. To help stem the possibility of a major riot, Mayor Allen Thompson authorized the funeral procession to conduct a silent march honoring Evers, but he and strategy committee members warned community members not to carry flags, sing freedom songs, or shout

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<sup>35</sup> Moody, *Coming of Age*, 300-06; Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi*, 186-96; Dittmer, *Local People*, 164-65.

slogans. Although the funeral procession remained solemn for much of the morning, it did not take long for frustrations over the indignities African Americans had suffered in Jackson to resurge. While walking down Farrish Street, hundreds of demonstrators defied city officials and conservative movement leaders and began marching towards Capitol Street, singing freedom songs. Police intercepted the marchers, fired bullets over their heads, and savagely beat many of them before taking over one thousand individuals to the Jackson fairgrounds stockade. Many were placed in sweatboxes, locked inside cars, or left outside in the sun without water.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, those who evaded arrest began throwing rocks and glass bottles at the police. In an effort to avoid a full-scale riot, Attorney John Doar of the Justice Department, who had been working with movement officials in Jackson, grabbed a bullhorn from a police officer and shouted to the angry crowd that “this wasn’t the way” and urged them to return home. CORE’s Dave Dennis and a few others began taking bottles from the crowd and similarly urged them to leave the area.<sup>37</sup>

Dittmer suggested that the “primary objective” of President John F. Kennedy and his brother Attorney General Robert Kennedy “was to bring an end to violence, which meant getting Black people off the streets,” so the administration urged Jackson officials to meet with members of the Black community to discuss a compromise they hoped would pacify both sides.<sup>38</sup> On June 18, just three days after the funeral, city officials promised to hire one garbage truck driver and six Black police officers within sixty days

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<sup>36</sup> “Police Power Meets Protesters During Days of Demonstrations,” June 22, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>37</sup> Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi*, 214-19; Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 306-08.

<sup>38</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 169.

and eight crosswalk guards by September, in exchange for an end to demonstrations. In a mass meeting held that night, hundreds of Black Jackson residents voted to accept the city's compromise offer, and the strategy committee subsequently announced a plan for a revitalized voter registration program. Dittmer wrote that in the wake of the compromise, "the death of Evers and the disillusionment over the Kennedy supported agreement with mayor Allen Thompson demoralized the young people who had originated and sustained the boycott."<sup>39</sup> Several SNCC members temporarily moved back into the Delta to reinforce community organizing efforts, while Ann Moody and Dave Dennis moved to Canton to assist a CORE project recently started by George Raymond. Though the compromise fell far short of the Jackson Movement's original goals, most national NAACP officers seemed confident that they had helped to secure a major civil rights victory and flew back to New York.<sup>40</sup>

Yet, Dittmer concludes incorrectly that because of the June 1963 agreement, Jackson "continued as a central headquarters for civil rights organizations [in Mississippi], [but] the Black community never again sustained a movement of its own."<sup>41</sup> By reviewing the events that followed after the agreement, however, a plethora of evidence reveals that the community-driven civil rights movement in Jackson did not falter but actually accelerated after June 1963. SNCC's Atlanta office assured the public that even if the NAACP made a statement to the effect of stopping demonstrations in Jackson, SNCC, SCLC, and CORE members were still in the area and willing to continue

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>40</sup> "Meeting Halts Marches; Vote Campaign Begins," June 22, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; Salter, *Jackson, Mississippi*, 178; Dittmer, *Local People*, 168-69.

<sup>41</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 169.



demonstrations. More importantly, many of Jackson's Black community, like individuals in other communities, exhibited growing militancy in the struggle, and for them, token compromises were no longer acceptable until they secured immediate and meaningful political, social, and economic changes. They remained determined to continue demonstrating despite reservations among middle-class Black conservatives and continued White segregationist resistance. By analyzing events that occurred before and followed after the more highly publicized periods of protest activity, one can understand civil rights activity as a more extended historical process.<sup>42</sup>

Ignoring the compromise, young protestors attempted to attend services at several White churches in the following weeks. Four worshippers successfully attended service at an Episcopal Church and the Catholic Church never turned anyone away, but laymen in other churches turned away any African Americans who attempted to attend White services. In the following weeks, as expected by Jackson militants, Mayor Thompson refused to desegregate schools, public parks, golf courses, eating establishments, movie theatres, or to even form a bi-racial committee. Jackson officials even drained public swimming pools to prevent the possibility of integration. The strategy committee and many in the Black community believed that city officials had negotiated in good faith and would comply with the agreement, but by July it seemed evident that the mayor and city aldermen would not meaningfully fulfill their obligations. Jackson's Black community,

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<sup>42</sup> Rubie D. Smith to James M. Bosby, Jr., June 25, 1963, SNCC Papers, reel 7, A=IV=221, frame 0648; Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, 134-35.

even its conservative ministers who had earlier called for marches to stop, rekindled mass protest activity against the power structure.<sup>43</sup>

The strategy committee also tightened boycott pressure against downtown merchants. Jackson's Black community forced Jordan's Supermarket on Lynch Street, originally targeted for boycott after an employee slapped a Black customer, as well as King the Tailor, a downtown tailoring shop, out of business. The NAACP estimated that 75% of previous customers, probably an overstatement, in Jackson stayed away from those businesses listed on the official boycott list. Growing economic pressure convinced Star Supermarket and, one month later, New Deal Supermarkets to reform their hiring and customer treatment policies. By the middle of September, city officials hired eight crossing guards for Black schools but also pushed back against the movement by purchasing a new armored riot wagon capable of holding more prisoners at any given time, while state attorneys convinced the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to halt any immediate efforts to desegregate the city's public school system.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, the broader Mississippi Movement shifted its focus in the fall 1963. Protest activity continued in Jackson and in other cities, but as historian Harvard Sitkoff

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<sup>43</sup> "City Fathers Won't Just Add Water...and Mix," September 14, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; "Kids Complain 'Nowhere to Go,'" October 5, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; "Kids Complain 'Nowhere to Go,'" October 5, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; "300 Protest City's 'Way of Life,'" July 27, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; "Mississippi Shakes as Demonstrations Grow: Ministers Vow New Protests," July 6, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>44</sup>"Boycott Power Proves Worth As Weapon," September 28, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; "Jackson Police Purchase Armored Riot Wagon," August 24, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; "Mayor Turns Down Civil Rights Inquiry," September 14, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; "Court Delays School Desegregation in Jackson, Biloxi, and Leake County," July 27, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4.

argued that demonstrators increasingly “considered the ballot box the key to empowering the dispossessed [and] they sought to organize the political strength of the Black masses as a weapon against both racism and poverty.”<sup>45</sup> White officials regularly denied meaningful enfranchisement to Black Mississippians, allowing only a token number of African Americans onto voter registration rolls. Hinds County re-opened its voter registration book by September, but White officials had removed all furniture from the room, locked the restrooms, allowed Whites to skip to the front of the line, and enrolled only thirty out of two-hundred Black applicants. Institutionalized voter discrimination, not apathy as White officials claimed, left Black communities effectively powerless to control their own political and economic destinies. During the fall, therefore, Black Mississippians and their allies organized two protest voting drives which they believed would illustrate the powerlessness of Black communities and, supporters hoped, would prompt federal officials to intervene and ensure unfettered voting rights.<sup>46</sup>

SNCC’s Bob Moses, who had originally provided a blueprint for a voter rights campaign in Mississippi, organized the first protest vote to coincide with the August 25 gubernatorial primary. At churches and community centers around the state, over 27,000 unregistered Black Mississippians voted on unofficial ballots which helped to negate the idea that African Americans did not aspire to vote. Following the August protest vote, Aaron Henry, Dave Dennis, Bob Moses, and Al Lowenstein reformed the COFO alliance

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<sup>45</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992, revised edition* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 156.

<sup>46</sup> “Voter Registration—17 to 3,” September 14, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4 “COFO Launches Vote Campaign,” December 21, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; “Negroes to File Freedom Votes,” August 24, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; SNCC, *Mississippi Freedom Vote Campaign pamphlet*, undated, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:135, frame 0676.

to direct voter registration projects around the state in an effort to politically mobilize all Black Mississippians. With encouragement from Bob Moses, Al Lowenstein invited financially independent White students from Yale and the College of the Pacific to assist the “Freedom Vote” campaign, slated to coincide with the state’s November general election. Aaron Henry and Ed King ran as unofficial candidates for governor and lieutenant governor on a platform calling for universal suffrage, desegregation of schools by 1965, a crash program to improve all phases of education, non discrimination in employment and the creation of a job training program, a viable minimum wage, and the repeal of anti-labor laws.<sup>47</sup>

On November 5, 90,000 Black Mississippians voted for Aaron Henry and Ed King on protest ballots. Of this milestone, historian Eric Burner wrote that “the psychological reward of the Freedom Vote was a much-needed impetus” for Black Mississippians.<sup>48</sup> They demonstrated that state officials purposefully denied meaningful franchise and that tokenism was no longer acceptable. Capitalizing on the momentum generated by the 1963 protest vote campaign, SNCC’s Bob Moses laid out the foundation for what became the 1964 Freedom Summer project at a November 14 COFO meeting. Staff would invite northern Whites to Mississippi to help twenty thousand Black Mississippians register to vote between December 1963 and March 1964 in anticipation

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<sup>47</sup> “Negroes Mount Massive Protest: 27,689 Cast Ballots Miss. Didn’t Want,” August 31, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; Aaron Henry, interview, 40; SNCC, advertisement for Freedom Vote, undated, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:114, frame 0355.

<sup>48</sup> Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them*, 119.

of the state's congressional primaries. COFO-backed candidates planned to challenge each of Mississippi's segregationist congressional leaders.<sup>49</sup>

The Jackson Movement did not exist only between December 1962 and June 1963. NAACP branch staff and community members forged a viable civil rights movement in Mississippi's capital in 1955, which became extremely well-publicized starting in December 1962. Throughout early 1963, Jackson Movement staff accelerated protest activity while COFO reorganized to begin building a state-wide political challenge to segregationist officials. Uncomfortable with the growing militancy of the movement, national NAACP officers and conservative members of the Black community began to pressure Black Jackson citizens and city officials to reach an agreement and end mass demonstrations before violence grew too costly. By June, city officials offered Jackson Movement leaders better employment opportunities for the Black community in exchange for an end to public demonstrations. Convinced that Mayor Thompson had negotiated in good faith, strategy committee leaders accepted the compromise. Yet, the more militant Black community members and activists ignored both city officials and conservative Blacks and sustained the Jackson Movement. When Thompson did not meaningfully honor the agreement, Jackson's wider Black community rekindled protest activity and began forming a grassroots political challenge to segregation.

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<sup>49</sup> "90,000 Vote for Henry...Johnson Refused Consent of Governed," November 9, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; "COFO Maps Future," November 16, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4.

## CHAPTER IV

## MISSISSIPPI RECKONING: DIVERGENCE WITHIN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

We know through painful experience that freedom is never  
voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the  
oppressed  
—Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham City Jail,”  
May 1963

In fall 1963, the Black community of Jackson, Mississippi, led by a strategy committee composed largely of middle-class African Americans and NAACP branch staff including R.L.T. Smith and Charles Evers, secured its foothold in attempting to dismantle institutionalized discrimination in the capital and decided to work more closely with Council of Federated Organizations (COFO)-led voter registration efforts. An umbrella alliance constituted by members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), COFO sought to empower Black Mississippians over the course of 1964 by forming an alternative political challenge to Mississippi’s segregationist power structure. From early 1964 to the summer of 1965, however, tension over funding, decision-making, publicity, and growing radicalism among some alliance members gradually fractured the COFO alliance and precipitated a schism within the Mississippi Movement in which militant activists continued to struggle for their conception of freedom while conservative Black Mississippians attempted to work within the regular Democratic Party to address continuing social problems.

As 1964 approached, city officials of Jackson, Mississippi, still refused to comply fully with movement demands that they desegregate public facilities, meet

regularly with the strategy committee to hear grievances, and hire at least twelve African American police officers and several school crosswalk guards to work in Black neighborhoods. In response, the strategy committee, which had coordinated most civil rights activity in Jackson up to this time, voted to continue the boycott against discriminatory downtown merchants while demonstrators on their own accord protested against the crowded and dilapidated conditions in Black schools. Although Mayor Allen Thompson attempted to break the boycott by offering prize money and free groceries to the winner of a segregated Christmas house decoration contest, Jackson's Black community repudiated the ruse in light of continued injustice throughout the state, and to honor the memory of Medgar Evers, President John Kennedy, and the four little girls killed in the September 15 bombing of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.<sup>1</sup>

Boycott pressure soon forced both Herman's Jewelers and O.P.O. Men's Wear on Capitol Street into bankruptcy, and by early 1964, the Boston Shoe Store and the Burns & Lacy Company also fell victim to the boycott. Meanwhile, declining revenues as a result of the boycott forced Jackson bus companies to cut their operating hours. State and national NAACP officers brought additional economic pressure on the city by urging national chain stores to pressure their southern branches to end discrimination and even convinced several national entertainers to cancel performances in the city. Finally, the

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<sup>1</sup>"Schools Are Unequal; 6 Women Demonstrate," *Mississippi Free Press*, December 21, 1963, Komisar (Lucy) Civil Rights Collection, box 1, folder 4, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS (hereafter cited as MFP Komisar Collection); "100 Percent No Decorations," December 21, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; "Mayor Tries Games: All Prices and Bribes Put down By Ministers," December 21, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; SNCC, summary report, December 12, 1963, Papers of SNCC, reel 38, A:XV:132, frames 0626-0627, Cook Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS (hereafter cited as SNCC Papers).

NAACP scored a major victory in March when it convinced Judge Sidney C. Mize to order Jackson, Biloxi, and Leake County school boards to provide plans, no later than July 15, 1964, to integrate by at least one grade-level per year.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Jackson Movement had entrenched itself firmly for sustained struggle by early 1964, John Dittmer notes correctly that “Jim Crow still held sway in the Magnolia State, with Black Mississippians relegated to inferior jobs, schools, and health care.”<sup>3</sup> COFO, therefore, finalized plans for its 1964 state-wide summer project designed to help enfranchise all Black Mississippians. Several movement veterans, particularly SNCC’s Fannie Lou Hamer, argued that securing equitable access to the ballot represented “as much a battle for Black equality as it was a fight to determine the future course of the state” and could be “an efficient and near-sure way to meet local needs” of all citizens.<sup>4</sup> By voting out ardent segregationists, Black Mississippians could help elect officials that were more responsive to all constituents. Crucial to the summer project, nearly three hundred people on April 26, 1964, formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in Jackson. Members planned to participate in Democratic

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<sup>2</sup> “Two More Driven Out: Mayor Hints Some Are Hurting,” December 14, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4; “Two More Set for Exit,” February 22, 1964, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 5; NAACP, “periodic report of activity at the Jackson office,” January 20, 1964, Papers of the NAACP, part 27, series A, reel 10, frame 00457-00458, Cook Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS (hereafter cited as NAACP Papers); Charles Evers to Wallace Tudor, January 21, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 27, series A, reel 10, frame 00462; “Hoss’ Won’t Come: Bonanza Star Refuses to Attend All-White Show,” January 25, 1964, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 5; “Courts Want Schools Open This September,” March 21, 1964, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>3</sup> John Dittmer, *The Good Doctors: The Medical Committee for Human Rights and the Struggle for Social Justice in Health Care* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom’s Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 61.



Party caucuses by running alternative candidates against incumbent segregationists. MFDP members Victoria Grey of Hattiesburg, Fannie Lou Hamer of Ruleville, James Houston of Vicksburg, and the Reverend John Earle Cameron of Hattiesburg planned to challenge, respectively, Senator John Stennis, Representative Jamie Whitten of Charleston, Representative John Bell Williams of Raymond, and Representative William Colmer of Pascagoula for their congressional seats.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, historian Chana Kai Lee Yet wrote that movement veterans realized that “it made little sense to recruit the disfranchised to go into a courthouse and register to vote when they were worried about eating or having shoes to wear.”<sup>6</sup> In coordination with an expanded voter registration campaign, COFO designed projects to provide education, health care, and job training to impoverished African Americans across the state. Planned by SNCC’s Charles Cobb, staff nearly fifty Freedom Schools across the state where volunteers taught Black history and lessons on civics and the voting process. SNCC’s Bob Moses and CORE’s Dave Dennis called upon summer project workers to organize about twenty-nine community centers that offered cultural and educational opportunities such as job training, adult literacy courses, information about health and child care, and programs about art and music in many rural areas.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 85; “Negro Enters Senate Race Against Stennis: 3 Congressman Also Get Challenges,” April 11, 1964, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>6</sup> Lee, *For Freedom’s Sake*, 62.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Burner, *And Gently He Shall Lead Them: Robert Parris Moses and Civil Rights in Mississippi*, (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 105, 122-24; SNCC, news release, March 20, 1964, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:134, frame 0658; Aaron Henry, interview by Neil McMillen and George Burson, May 1, 1972, Clarksdale, MS, transcript, 40, Center for Oral History, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS; Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992, revised* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 157; Clayborne

COFO members largely embraced these plans for community empowerment but debated extensively over the potential role of White volunteers in the summer project. SNCC members McArthur Cotton, Charlie Cobb, Ivanhoe Donaldson, Hollis Watkins, and Sam Block worried that northern Whites would supplant local Mississippians' role in the movement while Bob Moses, Lawrence Guyot, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Dave Dennis disagreed and encouraged White participation as a means to help improve race relations in the United States. Ultimately, COFO invited White, northern liberals as a pragmatic way to assist the Mississippi Movement as staff realized that no native White doctor and only a few of Mississippi's already scant number of Black doctors would treat civil rights workers. Therefore, the summer project needed northern doctors to come to Mississippi, while White college students could help garner national attention and ensure a sufficient number of staff for voter registration work and for operating the Freedom Schools.<sup>8</sup> Yet, COFO staff agreed that "decisions about the program and techniques in Mississippi were best made by those who lived and worked there and not by those unfamiliar with the state."<sup>9</sup>

Staff within the COFO alliance, however, voiced concerns over other aspects of the summer project. NAACP Field Secretary Charles Evers disliked SNCC's virtual control over policy-making decisions within COFO. Since only paid staff members from each parent organization could serve on COFO's strategy board, approximately forty of

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Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 109-10.

<sup>8</sup> Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 297-98; Dittmer, *The Good Doctors*, 33-37; SNCC, "Prospectus for the Mississippi Freedom Summer," undated, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:154, frame 0898-0904.

<sup>9</sup> COFO, Field Report, undated, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:149, frame 0837.

the seventy members represented SNCC. CORE had ten to fifteen representatives, versus five to ten members came from the SCLC. As the only officer who drew a salary from the NAACP, Charles Evers served as that organization's only voting representative.<sup>10</sup> NAACP Director of Branches Gloster Current worried that "unless we get some clear understanding as to our role, we are going to lose out in the publicity anyway to other organizations, and possibly run the risk of being more involved in some aspects than we care to be."<sup>11</sup> Over these concerns, national officers on May 27 met with Aaron Henry and Charles Evers of the Mississippi State Conference of Branches to discuss the NAACP's role in Freedom Summer.<sup>12</sup>

The NAACP's suspicions were not totally unwarranted. During a training session for Freedom Summer volunteers on May 25, NAACP staffer Laplois Ashford overheard accusations by some SNCC members that the NAACP feared losing potential recruits and publicity and that they would only raise funds for and assist COFO-organized projects if it garnered them positive media attention. In addition, a COFO handbook, that outlined organizing strategies for the Mississippi Movement, warned volunteers destined for Hinds County and the city of Jackson about probable frustrations they might develop while working with the area's conservative local leadership and NAACP officials. The handbook also indicated that "work in Jackson will have to be done within the context of

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<sup>10</sup> Aaron Henry to Bishop Stephen Spottswood, December 26, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00403-00406.

<sup>11</sup> Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, April 9, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00296.

<sup>12</sup> Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, Dr. Morsell, Mr. Moon, Mr. Ashford, and Mr. Carter, May 25, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00310.

building a community base to circumvent the established leadership after the summer.”<sup>13</sup> Tension grew increasingly palpable within the COFO alliance, but its members muted any disagreements in public and continued preparations to organize Mississippi’s Black communities. Still, these policy disagreements remained an issue for civil rights activists while planning for summer activity.

Meanwhile, Charles Payne noted that “as the plans for the summer [of 1964] evolved, Mississippi officialdom geared up for war.”<sup>14</sup> Most state officials and prominent businessmen, including those in the Sovereignty Commission and in the White Citizens’ Council, called on southern Whites to refrain from mob violence and instead to allow law enforcement officials to deal with summer volunteers.<sup>15</sup> James Forman of SNCC complained about the state legislature’s “constant stream of [new] laws designed to impede at every turn our efforts to initiate social change.”<sup>16</sup> A “riot control bill” increased funding for the Mississippi Highway Patrol and allowed its personnel to assist cities across the state with civil rights related disturbances, while the “anti-invasion” and “criminal syndicalism” bills criminalized the act of entering the state to violate Mississippi laws. House Bill 870 outlawed all picketing, with violators facing a fine of up

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<sup>13</sup>Laplois Ashford to Roy Wilkins, May 25, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00311; COFO, “Mississippi Handbook for Political Programs,” undated, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:123, frame 0526.

<sup>14</sup> Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 300.

<sup>15</sup> James Forman to Henry Michaels, May 19, 1964, SNCC Papers, reel 7, A:IV:221, frame 0710; John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 237; Erle Johnson, Jr., address in Canton, MS, May 1964, Citizens’ Council/Civil Rights Collection, box 3, folder 17, McCain Library & Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, 6; Yasuhiro Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States’ Rights* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 144-45.

<sup>16</sup> James Forman to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Michaels, May 19, 1964, SNCC Papers, reel 7, A=IV=221, frame 0710.

to one million dollars or two years in prison. In Jackson, the city council authorized Mayor Allen Thompson to deputize any person to help quell any demonstrations that summer.<sup>17</sup>

Prominent White Mississippians repudiated Klan violence that might prompt federal intervention on behalf of civil rights workers but often showed little concern for violence perpetrated by the state's penal system. Police accused White CORE member Richard A. Jewitt of public drunkenness while he ran errands in Jackson on the night of March 30. An officer interrogated Jewitt about possible connections to communism and his beliefs concerning interracial dating before assaulting him repeatedly and arresting him on false charges of resisting arrest and public drunkenness. Found guilty the next day, Jewitt served two days in the Hinds County jail before being bailed out.<sup>18</sup>

On April 16, 1964, Jackson police arrested Eli Hochstedler, a northern White student, and Marion Gillon, a local Black youth, for attempting to attend a showing of "Holiday on Ice" together at the Jackson Municipal Auditorium. Convicted the next day for Breach of the Peace, they were charged five hundred dollars and sentenced to six months imprisonment. Police placed Hochstedler in a cell where, later that evening, a dozen inmates entered and threatened to kill him. They forced Hochstedler to strip nude and lay on a bare metal mattress, where two prisoners then beat him repeatedly with leather belts. After police moved Hochstedler into another cell the next day, they placed

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.; COFO, news release, May 6, 1964, SNCC Papers, reel 59, C:III:38, frame 0496.

<sup>18</sup> Richard A. Jewett, affidavit, March 30, 1964, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:155, frame 0912-0913

another White student in his previous cell, where inmates beat him that night.<sup>19</sup> Even among other prisoners, civil rights activists did not enjoy equal protection under the law. By facilitating vigilante violence within prison walls, police exercised yet another strategy of intimidation against those who violated southern cultural mores.

As the state bolstered its law enforcement agencies, Mississippi's legislature increased funding to the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission and White Citizens' Council branches for investigation and public relations work. Legislators granted \$500,000, the largest allocation of money it had received up to that date, to the Sovereignty Committee beginning on July 1, 1964. The funding allowed the Commission to pay its three investigators Tom Scarbrough, Andy Hopkins, Virgil Downing, a salary of \$7,100 dollars a year to compile dossiers on suspected civil rights workers. Sometimes working in conjunction with each other, Sovereignty Commission staff and members of the Citizens' Council frequently canvassed voter registration meetings to photograph suspected civil rights activists and record their car registration information for use in later physical and economic retaliation against them. Their efforts to undermine plans for Freedom Summer extended even beyond the South. Using paid informants, the Sovereignty Commission obtained membership lists of Freedom Summer volunteers and investigated training workshops in the North for proof that civil rights activity was, as according to a WCC pamphlet, "nothing more than a cover-up and a spearhead for more socialism and communism."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Eli Hochstedler, affidavit, Hinds County, Jackson, MS, undated, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:95, frame 0097.

<sup>20</sup> James Forman to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Michaels, May 19, 1964, SNCC Papers, reel 7, A=IV=221, frame 0710; Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission*, 145-47, 162; White Citizens' Council, pamphlet, "Racial Facts," 1964, Citizens'

State officials and Sovereignty Committee staff found no such proof but still attempted to discredit the Freedom Summer operation through a national lecture campaign designed to convince Americans that Mississippi, with its supposedly harmonious race relations, was in the midst of an unwarranted, extremist, communist-inspired attack. On the floors of Congress, southern representatives openly accused civil rights activists of attempting to push for radical change through violent means. While debating a new civil rights act, Mississippi congressmen passed out copies of the *Jackson Advocate*, a black-owned newspaper that served as a mouthpiece for segregationists, to other members of Congress in an attempt to convince them that Black Mississippians were actually content with the status quo and did not want a civil rights bill.<sup>21</sup>

Mississippi's extensive allocation of personnel and resources to undermining civil rights activity illustrates the determination of White officials to maintain the status quo.

Although Mississippi officials attempted to distance themselves publically from the Ku Klux Klan and other vigilante groups, membership in the Klan grew significantly throughout late 1963 and 1964 from a "gut feeling that the battle for White supremacy was being lost" and that state leaders seemed unable to preserve segregation.<sup>22</sup> The number of cross burnings, beatings, and unsolved murders exploded throughout Mississippi, particularly in the southwest. In Natchez, for example, beginning in November 1963, a new group known as the Americans for the Preservation of the White Race (APWR) regularly terrorized black citizens. Despite its calls for law and order,

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Council/Civil Rights Collection, box miscellaneous, McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission*, 150-51; Keith M. Finley, *Delaying the Dream: Southern Senators and the Fight against Civil Rights, 1938-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 262-63; "Local Editor Says Congressman Lies," December 14, 1963, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>22</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 217.

Mississippi's power structure proved unwilling to curb vigilante activity in any meaningful way, particularly as many Klansmen regularly worked with or for state law enforcement agencies. Therefore, law enforcement officials and segregationist vigilantes both stood ready to resist waves of northern volunteers coming down during the summer of 1964.<sup>23</sup>

Before the arrival of northern volunteers, COFO established a network of offices around the state to coordinate civil rights activity. With its executive office in Jackson, COFO sent staff into all five congressional districts of Mississippi. In the first district, director Frank Smith led the COFO office in Holly Springs while Donald White organized activity in Columbus, Willie Blue in Batesville, and Claude Weaver in Tupelo. Considering the turbulent history of civil rights activity in the Delta, COFO sent a huge staff into the second congressional district. Director Sam Block worked with Charles Ray McLaurin in Indianola, Willie Shaw and Matthew Hughes in Belzoni, Willie Smith and James Jones in Clarksdale, Dickey Flowers in Tunica County, Fannie Lou Hamer in Ruleville, and Amzie Moore in Cleveland.<sup>24</sup>

Director McArthur Cotton in the McComb office, Jessie Harris in Hinds County, Dick Frey in Natchez, and Dave Greene in Vicksburg organized voter registration work for the third district. In the fourth district, only director George Greene and William McGee organized work while director Lawrence Guyot, Carl Arnold, John O'Neal, Jerry Bray, and Jimmy Lee Prewitt oversaw voter registration work in the fifth district. These core personnel instructed incoming volunteers, the first wave of whom arrived in mid

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<sup>23</sup> James Forman to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Michaels, May 19, 1964, SNCC Papers, reel 7, A=IV=221, frame 0711.

<sup>24</sup> Mississippi Staff to SNCC, "Proposal for Operation Mississippi," undated, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:135, frames 0681-0683.



June, on properly conducting voter registration work and on how to ensure the overall safety of project staff. All summer personnel were expected to correspond regularly with the state office in Jackson and to know the location of safe havens and escape routes in the communities in which they lived and worked.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps most importantly, these young COFO organizers were instructed to “move at a pace local people dictated and to respect the mores and beliefs of local communities.”<sup>26</sup> The Mississippi Movement wanted local communities to exercise agency over their own political destinies, so summer staff worked closely with Black Mississippians to inspire them in forging their own social institutions for community uplift.

Although COFO established its central office in the capital, the strategy committee, composed largely of conservative black community members and NAACP branch staff, organized most civil rights activity within Jackson though they agreed to cooperate with COFO-outlined efforts to expand voter registration work and to build momentum for the MFDP. Conservative Black Mississippians and the more militant community members and staff of SNCC shared a common desire to expand the number of registered voters and to help Black Mississippians engage meaningfully in the political process. Throughout June and July, Black Mississippians attempted to participate in Democratic Party precinct meetings throughout the state, but most were turned away or whites had secretly changed the meeting place. On the morning of June 23, for example, forty-two year-old domestic worker and Jackson resident Hazel T. Palmer and fellow poll watcher Mannie Benson approached the Hinds County nominating convention but were

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<sup>25</sup> Mississippi Staff to SNCC, “Proposal for Operation Mississippi,” undated, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:135, frames 0681-0683; COFO, “Mississippi Handbook for Political Programs,” undated, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:123, frame 0519-0520.

<sup>26</sup> Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 206.

turned away by the chairman and four white guards. Only a few African Americans successfully attended meetings, primarily in such larger areas as Greenville and Jackson. Because the Democratic Party in Mississippi continued to deny African Americans access to the regular convention meetings, COFO staff continued working to garner support for the MFDP and its challenge to incumbent White congressmen and to the state's delegation to the 1964 national Democratic Party convention.<sup>27</sup>

Still, Mississippi staff could celebrate passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which mandated the desegregation of public facilities. Shortly thereafter, a group of national NAACP officers visited the Magnolia State to test the state's compliance with the legislation and to investigate any reports of continued intimidation of African Americans. Arriving in Jackson on July 5, staff made reservations at the luxurious King Edward Hotel, the Heidelberg Hotel, and the Sun n' Sand Motel without incident, as the police did not wish to solicit negative media attention and possibly prompt federal intervention. Members of the Citizens' Council in Jackson, however, called immediately for a boycott against any White-owned business that served Black customers. Yet, the harsh economic impact of a sustained, two year-long boycott in the city convinced most Whites not to boycott, and with pressure from Jackson's Chamber of Commerce, city officials begrudgingly urged compliance with the Civil Rights Act. This reinforces historian David Chappell's contention that southern Whites increasingly "found themselves compelled to break with the segregationists in order to restore social peace, a good

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<sup>27</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 273; "State Demos Separate," June 27, 1964, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 5; Hazel T. Palmer, affidavit, June 23, 1964, SNCC Papers, reel 39, A:XV:170, frame 0215.

business climate, [and] the good name of their city in the national headlines.”<sup>28</sup> From July 5 to 8, the NAACP delegation visited Canton, Philadelphia, Meridian, Laurel, Moss Point, Biloxi, Gulfport and Clarksdale, where they received similarly cool receptions. During their trip, however, the NAACP delegation learned about numerous instances of continued discrimination against Mississippi Blacks and therefore demanded federal intervention into the state to protect the constitutional rights of African Americans. COFO, however, largely criticized the trip as a publicity stunt that only detracted from the state-wide voter registration campaign.<sup>29</sup>

Dittmer argues that growing tension over funding, publicity, and decision-making, prompted a “serious division within the [COFO-led] Mississippi Movement [by the summer of 1964], a split encouraged by the national office of the NAACP.”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, NAACP national staffer Laplois Ashford lambasted COFO leaders for the occasional problems in adequately housing volunteers, while Gloster Current demanded continued relations with the regular Mississippi Democratic Party. National and state NAACP officers also resented their limited influence over policy formation, particularly since their organization provided a significant portion of funds to the Mississippi project, even during a period of financial hardship for the national office. The NAACP understandably worried about losing agency over its own projects and staff, and on July 1 tapped

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<sup>28</sup> David Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), xxii.

<sup>29</sup> NAACP, “Report of the Special Mississippi Investigation Committee of the National Board of Directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” undated, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frames 00331-00343; Dittmer, *Local People*, 275; “White Citizens’ Council Dilemma: Sanity Beginning to Show in Mississippi,” MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 5; Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission*, 168; “Racists Squawk as Jackson Astounds Nation: Law and Order Ability Proved,” July 11, 1964, MFP Komisar Collection, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>30</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 274.

Clarence Laws as the new NAACP regional director for the southwest and liaison to COFO to reinforce its presence in Mississippi. Yet, the national office of the NAACP alone did not precipitate growing tension within COFO. Despite their financial contributions and long record of service in Mississippi, members of SNCC, CORE, and the SCLC frequently criticized the NAACP's more conservative approach towards civil rights activism, a charge NAACP staff heavily resented. Still, even if the four organizations grew increasingly unsure about the future of allied projects, COFO at least held firm on its summer project objectives.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, in response to the influx of civil rights workers, Mississippi Governor Paul Johnson and other top state officials continued to worry about possible negative media attention surrounding White extremists, such as members of the Klan, and warned them publically not to interfere with police efforts to round up demonstrators. Yet, the rest of the nation nonetheless learned about countless instances of vigilante-organized violence and police brutality against summer volunteers. The murders of CORE members Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, White volunteers from New York, and Black Mississippian James Chaney, shocked the nation. While investigating the recent burning of the Mount Zion Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Mississippi, on June 21, local police arrested and held the three men until nightfall. A group of Klansmen chased the men, when they were released later that night, by car and forced the trio down

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<sup>31</sup> Laplois Ashford to Gloster Current, June 5, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frames 00327-00328; Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, Mr. Morsell, Mr. Mitchell, July 22, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00330; John Morsell to Aaron Henry, June 17, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00329; Gloster Current to Bob Moses, July 1, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00344.

a gravel road where they then shot and buried the men in an earthen dam. FBI agents found the bodies on August 4.<sup>32</sup>

Violence erupted around the state throughout the summer, even in Mississippi's capital. Two carloads of Whites armed with bricks and bats knocked out the windows of COFO's Jackson office on June 2, injuring one person. On June 23, an unidentified assailant fired shots into the home of local Black businessman and strategy committee member R.L.T. Smith while other unidentified Whites fired three shots into Henderson's Café, hitting a Black man twice in the head and wounding him. The COFO office also reported the July 6 burning of the McCraven-Hill Missionary Baptist Church, even though it had no connection to the civil rights movement, and several instances of phone harassment and random beatings of Black youths and White volunteers in Jackson.<sup>33</sup>

While an integrated group of volunteers ate at a drive-in on July 12, White teenagers slashed the tires of their car and spit in their faces. That same day, an elderly White man attacked a Black woman at the Greyhound terminal coffee shop. Police arrested the wounded woman for disturbing the peace, while her attacker escaped. On July 22, two Whites beat a summer volunteer with clubs at a downtown Jackson intersection, and on August 4, an unidentified White man chased a local Black volunteer out of a diner and subsequently drove after him in a truck, firing two shots at him. Similarly, a White man armed with a pistol chased White student volunteer Mary Zeno

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<sup>32</sup> Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission*, 163-64.

<sup>33</sup> COFO, press release, "Mississippi Hoodlums Attack COFO Office," June 5, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00324; COFO, report, "Mississippi Summer Project: Running Summary of Incidents," undated, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:157, frame 0976; *Ibid.*, frame 0978.

and local black activist Rommie Drain as they canvassed Black neighborhoods for potential voters.<sup>34</sup>

August 15 marked a particularly brutal day for summer volunteers in Jackson. An unidentified individual beat volunteer Philip Hocker with a baseball bat outside the COFO office, while at least two integrated carloads of volunteers were shot at. That night, an individual shot local student Willie Gynes in the leg, and throughout the night, local Klansmen burned crosses across the city at locations frequented by summer project staff. Incident reports compiled by the Jackson COFO office also confirmed numerous instances of brutal treatment within Mississippi's penal system. On June 27, three White prisoners beat twenty-three-year-old Edward S. Hollander, a CORE field secretary from Baltimore, Maryland, in a Hinds County jail.<sup>35</sup>

Police routinely arrested or intimidated civil rights workers. On June 25, Jackson officers arrested eight volunteers for minor traffic charges, most of which they had fabricated. Other workers were simply detained for several hours or fined and then released. According to one affidavit, police intercepted Willie Funches and two other Black youths on their way to the COFO office in Jackson and accused them of having thrown rocks and bricks at police officers earlier in the day. One officer struck Funches in the stomach with a nightstick and before allowing the trio to leave, warned them that "if I catch any of you three in any of the demonstrations I'll shoot all of you niggers and

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<sup>34</sup> COFO, report, "Mississippi Summer Project: Running Summary of Incidents," undated, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:157, frame 0979, frame 0981, frame 0984.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., frame 0986; COFO, incident report, June 27, 1964, SNCC Papers, reel 39, A:XV:170, frame 0232; Jimmy Lee Wilcox, affidavit, June 30, 1964, SNCC Papers, reel 39, A:XV:170, frame 0234; COFO, report, "Mississippi Summer Project," frame 0977.

smoke my cigar on top of you and think nothing about it.”<sup>36</sup> Police charged a local Jackson Black volunteer on August 3 with vagrancy for wearing a SNCC button outside a drugstore near his home and, on August 7, arrested SNCC’s Ivanhoe Donaldson for possession of an improper driver’s license, though he was not driving at the time.<sup>37</sup>

The explosion of violence prompted greater federal attention on the state. With a FBI field office in Jackson by the end of the summer and continued vigilance by civil rights activists, White officials in Mississippi, suggested Charles Payne, “could no longer completely suppress Black activism, but Black activism could make no major dents in the structure of opposition.”<sup>38</sup> While in some municipalities the Klan and local leadership continued to work together, state officials began purging known Klan members from police units. Even in Mississippi’s legislature, more moderate members became increasingly vocal on civil rights issues. Erle Johnson, director of the Sovereignty Commission and a self-proclaimed “practical segregationist,” recognized the futility of continued resistance to federal involvement and urged other state officials to comply with civil rights legislation. On the other hand, William J. Simmons, head of Jackson’s Citizens’ Council and an ardent segregationist, accused Johnson and other moderates in the state legislature of “giving up” in the effort to maintain segregation. While racists held control of high state offices, the freedom struggle successfully created fissures

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<sup>36</sup> Willie Funches, affidavit, July 5, 1964, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:155, frame 0931.

<sup>37</sup> COFO, report, “Mississippi Summer Project: Running Summary of Incidents,” undated, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:157, frame 0984.

<sup>38</sup> Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 285.

within Mississippi's power structure and in White communities over the future of race relations.<sup>39</sup>

By the end of the summer project, COFO successfully registered sixteen to eighteen hundred new voters, which the NAACP's Aaron Henry credited to the work of each member organization; yet, Black Mississippians still did not enjoy equal protection under the law or have the means to control their political and economic destinies and so Bob Moses announced on August 19 that two hundred volunteers, sixty-five SNCC members, and thirty CORE staff would remain in Mississippi to continue voter registration work and to maintain community outreach projects. In addition, several medical, legal, and ministerial groups promised to establish permanent operations in the state. Efforts, though, primarily shifted towards the MFDP's challenge of the state's regular delegation to the Democratic Party national convention in August. The MFDP sought recognition as the only legitimate political entity from Mississippi that truly represented all of the state's constituents and planned to petition Democratic Party officials to seat MFDP delegates at the convention instead of Mississippi's regular all-White segregationist delegation.<sup>40</sup>

Most of the sixty-member MFDP delegation arrived in Atlantic City, New Jersey, by August 21 and seemed confident that the Credentials Committee would recognize them as the legitimate representatives of Mississippi. They had considerable reason to believe so because Mississippi's regular all-White delegation excluded Blacks, supported

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<sup>39</sup> Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission*, 174-75; Dittmer, *Local People*, 250; Erle Johnson, *I Rolled with Ross: A Political Portrait* (Baton Rouge: Moran, 1980), 116-17; Dittmer, *The Good Doctors*, 101.

<sup>40</sup> COFO, report, "Mississippi Summer Project: Running Summary of Incidents," undated, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:157, frame 0988; Dittmer, *The Good Doctors*, 61.



Republican candidate Barry Goldwater, and often criticized President Lyndon Johnson's domestic policies. Unfortunately, President Johnson worried about losing the party's southern base of support and heavily pressured the Freedom Democrats to accept a token compromise to seat only members Aaron Henry and Ed King. The SCLC's Martin Luther King, CORE's James Farmer, and the NAACP's Roy Wilkins and Aaron Henry expressed support for the MFDP challenge but urged them to accept the compromise. Growing increasingly frustrated with the MFDP's hesitancy, Roy Wilkins suggested that "you [MFDP members] all are just ignorant...you should just pack your bags up and go home."<sup>41</sup> Yet, MFDP members lambasted the idea of compromising and, on August 26, unanimously rejected the offer. In response, President Johnson and his political allies successfully pressured the Credentials Committee to reject the MFDP's petition for gaining Mississippi's seats.<sup>42</sup>

In the wake of this defeat, the COFO-led Mississippi Movement underwent a major transition from fall 1964 into the spring of 1965. Dittmer noted that "Freedom Summer and the attendant national publicity brought grudging compliance [from much of the state] with the new civil rights act and the peaceful desegregation of a handful of students."<sup>43</sup> Yet, Black Mississippians had failed to secure meaningful franchise with which to empower their lives and communities, while the MFDP's defeat at the national convention dealt a blow to the morale of movement veterans, particularly the more militant SNCC youth. COFO's Jackson office fell increasingly into disarray while several staff within the alliance exhibited growing disillusionment and pessimism over

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<sup>41</sup> Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 100.

<sup>42</sup> Aaron Henry, interview, 54-55; Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 88-100; Carson, *In Struggle*, 124-29.

<sup>43</sup> Dittmer, *The Good Doctors*, 101.

the future and direction of the freedom struggle. Members questioned whether they should continue to work with northern White liberals or even with less militant activists and conservative middle-class Black leaders.<sup>44</sup>

Tension grew increasingly disruptive within the civil rights alliance. SNCC's and CORE's growing radicalism placed them at greater odds than ever with moderate national and Mississippi NAACP staff. Although previously muted, SNCC and NAACP members, in particular, increasingly vented their frustrations about each other publically. SNCC's Fannie Lou Hamer resented how largely middle-class NAACP staff like Roy Wilkins and Gloster Current often belittled the attempts by rural, poor Mississippians to secure political control over their communities and to address the needs of impoverished Blacks. Hamer recounted accusations that undereducated Mississippi Blacks lacked adequate organizing skills. Historian Chana Kai Lee noted that a divergence within COFO increasingly pitted impoverished Black Mississippians and their militant allies, who wanted to address the local needs of communities and "felt that the NAACP thought itself superior and better able to determine what was best for Mississippi," against largely middle-class NAACP members, who thought that more militant activists of COFO were "unappreciative" and "that local people [around Mississippi] only wanted the NAACP around when local campaigns needed financial or legal support"<sup>45</sup>

The NAACP furthermore criticized SNCC's apparent takeover of most local projects in Mississippi, particularly in rural areas. NAACP members grumbled that "policy and execution in COFO are [increasingly] outside [the] command" of the

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<sup>44</sup> Carson, *In Struggle*, 137; Dittmer, *Local People*, 329-30; Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 100-01.

<sup>45</sup> Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 115.

NAACP and many seemed convinced that individuals within the alliance were “definitely anti-NAACP” and “wanted to see it destroyed.”<sup>46</sup> C.C. Bryant of the Pike County chapter in McComb complained that SNCC staff usually ignored the NAACP’s advice when discussing project plans and often treated them rudely. Bryant and R.L.T. Smith of the Jackson branch suggested that the NAACP State Conference of Branches revitalize its own voter registration program, separate from COFO.<sup>47</sup> Gloster Current even expressed his confidence that the organization could operate its voter registration programs more effectively on its own and suggested that “in the end we can be responsible for our own program and mistakes.”<sup>48</sup>

Tension between Mississippi staff of the NAACP and other COFO members came to a breaking point in November 1964. On November 8, 1964, the NAACP’s Mississippi State Conference of Branches finally requested permission from the national office to break all relations with the COFO alliance. Only Aaron Henry had spoken in favor of continuing relations with COFO, but he stayed loyal to the NAACP and voted with his fellow members. Mississippi’s NAACP staff expressed a willingness to continue efforts to work within the political machinery of the Democratic Party that few other COFO members shared. The national office, however, deferred its decision over whether to break away from the alliance until it had met with the heads of SNCC, CORE, and the SCLC and had thoroughly considered the implications of such action. In the

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<sup>46</sup> Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, “Memorandum Regarding Problems for Association and Mississippi,” November 5, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 4, frame 00354.

<sup>47</sup> C.C. Bryant to Roy Wilkins, December 15, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00381-00382; R.L.T. Smith to NAACP Board of Directors, September 9, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00345-00346.

<sup>48</sup> Current to Wilkins, “Memorandum Regarding Problems for Association and Mississippi,” November 5, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00355.

meantime, the national office continued to receive reports from field staff that SNCC virtually controlled COFO and did not consult with the other members of COFO concerning policy decisions, which was particularly irksome since the NAACP had funded so much of the Mississippi Movement, including \$380,000 in bail money during the 1963 demonstrations.<sup>49</sup>

As rumors spread about the NAACP's possible split from COFO, Benjamin McAddo, a long time financial contributor, threatened to stop donating to the NAACP if it pulled out of COFO. Maurice Wheeler, father of a Mississippi volunteer, urged the NAACP to continue working with the other organizations involved, as "they [COFO] need the financial support of the NAACP and the strength of its name, as well as the advice and counsel of the experienced people in the NAACP."<sup>50</sup> Roy Wilkins informed McAddo that the national office had not yet made its decision on whether to cut ties with COFO, and more importantly, Wilkins explained that Mississippi staff had requested permission to break away from COFO. The national office had not, as many Americans

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<sup>49</sup> Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, "Memorandum Regarding Action of the Mississippi State Conference Board of Directors Recommending Withdrawal from COFO," November 9, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00356-00357; Aaron Henry to Bishop Stephen Spottswood, December 26, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00405; Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, Bishop Stephen G. Spottswood, and members of the board, December 29, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00411-00412, 00416; Roy Wilkins to NAACP branch managers, "NAACP Studies Relations with Mississippi COFO," November 30, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00389-00393.

<sup>50</sup> Maurice Wheeler to Roy Wilkins, December 5, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00380.

assumed at the time, forced the Mississippi State Conference of Branches to reconsider its future in the alliance but mulled over the possible implications of such a break.<sup>51</sup>

Regardless of growing split within COFO, MFDP members continued their struggle for political power. Because all MFDP candidates lost their Democratic Party primary elections earlier in the spring and state officials refused to allow them to run in the November 1964 state election as Democrats and as a result five MFDP candidates collected signatures to run as independents. When the signatures were turned over to the state election commission, however, the commission claimed that none of the candidates had acquired the necessary number of signatures. Only later did the MFDP find proof that state officials had thrown away a number of signatures. In protest, another Freedom Vote ballot on November 3 pitted Harold Ruby against First District Representative Thomas Abernathy, Fannie Lou Hamer in the Second District against Representative Jamie Whitten, Annie Devine against Arthur Winstead in the Fourth District, Victoria Jackson Gray against Fifth District Representative William Colmer, and Aaron Henry, who later dropped out, against Senator John Stennis.<sup>52</sup> Results from the protest vote were opposite of the state's official election results, which proved that continued existence of discriminatory voting practices by Mississippi officials. The MFDP therefore filed legal briefs in early 1965 against the state to challenge the legitimacy of the congressional election results.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Benjamin McAdoo to Roy Wilkins, December 5, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00378; Roy Wilkins to Benjamin McAdoo, December 14, 1964, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00375-00379.

<sup>52</sup> Note: no MFDP candidate ran for the third congressional district, which included most of the southwest portion of the state and was particularly known for rampant and brutal mob violence against civil rights activists.

<sup>53</sup> Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 108-14.

As COFO increasingly unraveled over the spring of 1965, many of the more militant Mississippi veterans drifted into Louisiana and Alabama throughout the spring of 1965 to establish new local projects, while most COFO workers who remained in the state joined the MFDP. SNCC's Bernard Lafayette, who had organized activity in Jackson and Laurel, Mississippi, established a voter registration project in Selma, Alabama, during February. In conjunction with Martin Luther King, Jr. and a SCLC project started in January, staff led numerous attempts to register African Americans in the city. After repeated failures, civil rights workers decided to garner national attention to continued voting discrimination in Alabama by protesting the recent murder of Jimmie Lee Jackson by an Alabama state trooper. Martin Luther King planned to lead a march from Selma to the state capital of Montgomery, starting on March 7, to publicly denounce Alabama's denial of meaningful Black suffrage. Media officials filmed how police intercepted the marchers and beat them savagely on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, gateway to Montgomery. When the rest of the nation learned that White vigilantes had beaten Boston native Reverend James J. Reeb, who died of his injuries, President Lyndon Johnson on March 15 publicly called for Congress to pass a voting rights bill and pressured Alabama Governor George Wallace to ensure the safe passage of Selma marchers to Montgomery. Arriving successfully on March 21, Martin Luther King reiterated his demand for voting rights legislation.<sup>54</sup>

Back in Mississippi, newly appointed MFDP chairman Lawrence Guyot and militant local youth helped twenty-two Black citizens of Jackson attempt voter

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<sup>54</sup> Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission*, 185-88; Carson, *In Struggle*, 173; Dittmer, *Local People*, 343-44; Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, 174-82.

registration on “Freedom Day” March 15, 1965. Thirty police and an armored riot car, however, met the crowd and ordered them all to leave. In response, group members retrieved picket signs from their cars and were subsequently arrested and given thirty-day sentences in prison. Conservative Black community leaders and NAACP branch members including R.L.T Smith and Charles Evers did not seem keen on joining these demonstrations. Jackson NAACP branch files concerning activity during the spring and summer of 1965 reveal very little action other than tentative plans for another voter registration campaign that summer. It reasonably stands that the NAACP and its allies in Jackson, less militant than the MFDP, supported voter registration work and building support for a proposed voter rights act but remained highly hesitant over the prospect of provoking violent backlash from White authorities via demonstrations, particularly since the Jackson Movement’s original goals had been achieved by the summer of 1965.<sup>55</sup>

After lengthy debate during the spring of 1965, the NAACP’s national office approved on April 13, 1965, the Mississippi Conference of Branches’ request to withdraw from COFO. In a public statement, officials cited a “long-established policy against continuing and permanent affiliation of any kind with organizations over which the NAACP exercises no control” and further explained that “the Board had never authorized or approved affiliation of the Mississippi branches with COFO.”<sup>56</sup> Dittmer wrote that the NAACP’s withdrawal “was not fatal, but it accelerated COFO’s decline, coming as it did at a time when movement leaders themselves were questioning COFO’s

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<sup>55</sup> COFO, “Running Summary—March 12-22, 1965,” undated, SNCC Papers, reel 59, C:III:38, frame 0527; Gloster Current to Jack Young, April 19, 1965, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00447.

<sup>56</sup> NAACP, “NAACP Board Cites Policy on Group Affiliations,” April 13, 1965, NAACP Papers, part 21, reel 14, frame 00445.

relevance now that the MFDP was emerging as the major voice of the movement in the state.”<sup>57</sup> Although staff did not officially dissolve COFO until late July, Dittmer suggests that most activists now recognized that the umbrella organization had effectively “outlived its usefulness.”<sup>58</sup> Most SNCC and CORE members moved into Alabama and Louisiana or to urban areas of the North and West to help organize community-led projects while individuals who remained in Mississippi largely joined the MFDP.

By the summer of 1965, Jackson city officials employed twelve Black officers and ten crossing guards, while several White-owned businesses had begun hiring office workers and regularly addressed Black and White customers with courtesy titles. Bus stations, railroad stations, and airports were all desegregated, as well as most hotels and eating establishments. Also, members of Jackson’s Black community now regularly communicated with city officials, and during the spring, thirty eight Black students had attended previously all-White schools without incident. Despite hesitation from the NAACP, MFDP staff showed no such hesitation and demanded that Mississippi officials address continuing problems with irregular voting practices, unequal access to viable employment, housing, healthcare, and rampant police brutality against African Americans. Although initiated and largely sustained up to this point by the NAACP and members of Jackson’s black community, the MFDP now held the reins of the Jackson Movement.<sup>59</sup>

In an effort to undermine the moral authority of the MFDP, however, Governor Paul Johnson called Mississippi’s legislature into session during mid-June to repeal

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<sup>57</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 343.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> R.L.T. Smith, “Memorial Service for Medgar Evers,” June 13, 1965, NAACP Papers, part 27, series A, reel 10, frame 00530-00531.



discriminatory voting laws, including the constitutional interpretation and good character requirements. Dittmer attributes Johnson's sudden change in policy to a plan designed to place Mississippi's voting laws on relative standing with other states in order to challenge the anticipated Voting Rights Act in court. Yet, because of voter discrimination during the November 1964 election, MFDP members did not view current state officials as legitimate representatives and therefore dismissed the validity of any action taken by special session. Instead, the MFDP called for demonstrations at the state capitol to provoke congressional action in upholding voting rights laws.<sup>60</sup>

On the morning of June 14, 1965, MFDP chair Lawrence Guyot led five hundred demonstrators out of the Morning Street Baptist Church for a silent, mile-long march to the state Capitol. Nearly half were in their teens, and about seventy-five were recently-arrived White volunteers from outside the South. Halfway to the Capitol building, police intercepted the marchers, savagely beat many of them, and arrested four hundred and eighty-two for parading without a permit. Guyot called immediately for an explosion of protest activity in Jackson, and answering the call, 859 marchers were jailed by the end of the first week.<sup>61</sup>

Dittmer recognized that, sadly, accounts confirmed that "a ritualized pattern of police brutality bordering on torture emerged from the fairgrounds compound [as] female prisoners were subjected to lewd and suggestive remarks, including promises of release in return for sexual favors," while officers armed with batons beat several men's genitals.<sup>62</sup> Most were denied medicine and treatment for their injuries or illnesses. State

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<sup>60</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 344.

<sup>61</sup> Dittmer, *The Good Doctors*, 103.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

and local officials, of course, denied any wrongdoing. Compounding these problems, with little public brutality against the marchers media sources quickly lost interest in events in Jackson and what little bond money the MFDP had available quickly dried up. Most Jackson clergymen were not particularly supportive of Guyot's rationale for the march nor were they in the mood to deal with harsh penal conditions at this time and subsequently stayed away from the demonstrations. The Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals eventually enjoined the city from arresting demonstrators but not before police had 1,028 individuals in custody. Of those arrested between June 14 and June 30, 603 were adults and 425 were youths. The Justice Committee investigated reports of brutal treatment within the fairgrounds, but did little else.<sup>63</sup>

Dittmer pointed out that "Guyot's attempt to re-create the Selma campaign in Jackson had failed despite the hundreds of people who voluntarily went to jail."<sup>64</sup> The MFDP could not provoke federal officials to protect the marchers, nor did it prompt Congress to pass voter rights legislation with any greater urgency. Moderate Black community members, state officials, and the federal government had seemingly recognized the inevitability of a voting rights act becoming law and did little to aid demonstrators in their cause. Furthermore, the June demonstrations largely lacked the moral authority of the Selma campaign. The little media attention given to the demonstrations captured only a few images of police brutality, and no mob beatings or murders occurred to shock the rest of the nation into action as in Selma.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 105-06; John Doar to Senator Jacob K. Javits, July 20, 1965, SNCC Papers, reel 38, A:XV:100, frame 00125-00126.

<sup>64</sup> Dittmer, *The Good Doctors*, 120.

In early July, a few peaceful marches occurred in Jackson without incident, but no longer confident of securing further concessions by the state government, the MFDP stopped demonstrating in Mississippi and instead focused on its political challenge in Washington D.C. Meanwhile, Mississippi's legislature repealed the state's discriminatory voting laws, and within a month President Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act, which suspended discriminatory voter registration practices such as literacy tests and sent federal registrars into southern states to ensure compliance. Despite extensive testimony and evidence proving voter discrimination in Mississippi, the Congressional Subcommittee on Elections and Privileges recommended in September the dismissal of MFDP's challenge to November 1964 election results, which Congress subsequently voted to do.<sup>65</sup>

With the NAACP's new Field Secretary Charles Evers, the Jackson Movement sustained boycott activity into 1964 while the COFO alliance broadened voter registration activity across Mississippi. COFO organized the MFDP as a political challenge to the state's segregationist power structure but its failure to unseat the state's regular Democratic Party accelerated growing tensions within the COFO alliance. Disputes over policy decisions ultimately culminated in the dissolution of COFO. By the end of summer 1965, President Lyndon Johnson had signed into law the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, which essentially ensured unfettered access to public institutions and services, as well as dismantled most barriers to voting throughout the United States. Yet, African Americans in the South and elsewhere continued to deal with negative stereotypes, the omnipresent threat of police brutality, and institutionalized racism

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 106-07; Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, 182; Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, 114.

concerning equitable access to housing, medical care, education, and employment. Since Jackson officials had conceded to most original demands of the Jackson Movement, most of the community seemed unwilling to engage in continued militant protest activity as in other parts of Mississippi and in America.

In the years following 1965, various groups of Black Americans attempted to help their communities internalize a more positive self-image and to empower themselves for self-reliance apart from political leaders and the federal government. Nevertheless, the burgeoning Black Power Movement in the United States sparked a growing chasm between activists promoting continued change and moderates, including those in the federal government. Distraught over increasingly militant demands, federal officials, White liberals, and conservative Black Mississippians no longer recognized the moral authority of the continuing freedom struggle for African Americans' self determination and precipitated a vicious campaign to undermine any perception of legitimacy for further activism.

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

I don't see any American Dream...I see an American Nightmare  
—Malcolm X

Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive  
decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the  
oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the  
fatherless.

—Isaiah 10: 1-2

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other professional civil rights organizations emerged during the twentieth century in an effort to secure social and economic advancement for African Americans, and by the 1950s and 1960s, had made considerable gains in several cities. In Jackson, Mississippi, a grassroots community-driven civil rights movement coalesced in 1955 with a petition-drive designed to pressure city officials to integrate public schools in compliance with the 1954 *Brown* decision. Although not successful at the time, members of the Black community and NAACP branch staff soon initiated a voter registration project and boycotts against discriminatory White-owned businesses. They were joined in 1961 by civil rights activists from outside Mississippi, who helped foment a wave of nonviolent protests and primed Jackson's Black community for widespread civil rights activity for 1963. By the summer of 1963, NAACP officers and Jackson's conservative African Americans convinced most Black community members to accept concessions by city officials that only partially fulfilled original movement demands. Undeterred, several of the more militant youth and activists sustained the Jackson Movement and, within a month, were joined again by Black conservatives when city officials proved unwilling to fulfill their compromise obligations.

Meanwhile, the reformed Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) began mobilizing Mississippi's Black communities to challenge the state's segregationist power structure and thereby enable greater control over their political and economic destinies. Although COFO members first attempted to work within the traditional political machinery of the Democratic Party, its refusal to allow meaningful participation in the political process prompted movement personnel to form an alternative political institution known as the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), which worked to replace the state's segregationist governor and congressional leaders. Yet, tension within COFO grew increasingly problematic due to disagreements over funding and policy formation, particularly questions over the extent and means by which movement activists would address continuing social and economic problems in Black communities. Disillusioned by compromise efforts that fell short of their original goals during the 1964 National Democratic Party Convention, militant activists and impoverished Black Mississippians grew less willing to work with the federal government, White northern liberals, and Black conservatives, including NAACP members.

On the other hand, conservative Black Mississippians who exhibited a preference for slower-paced social change continued their efforts to expand the number of registered voters and to attempt working within the political mechanisms of the state's regular Democratic Party. In Jackson, conservative community members such as businessman I.S. Sanders and clergyman Rev. R.L.T. Smith as well as the NAACP staff, led by Field Secretary Charles Evers, increasingly diverged from the radicalizing Mississippi Movement led largely by the MFDP. By the summer of 1965, southern governments, including Jackson's White leadership, largely had dismantled segregated public facilities

and most overtly discriminatory voting policies. Few politicians continued openly to challenge the authority of the federal government. Jackson city officials had even begun slowly integrating some schools and hired a number of new Black employees.

Historian Harvard Sitkoff argues convincingly that most Americans had “accepted the civil rights gains of the first half of the decade as necessary and just.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, into the late 1960s, some Black Americans across the country still sought “to address the debilitating political and economic subjugation that continued to plague [them] after the passage of civil rights legislation in 1960, 1964, and 1965.”<sup>2</sup> Increasingly embittered by government officials who seemed unresponsive to their needs and who continued to protect White privilege, many Blacks, particularly those of the lower classes, decided no longer to rely primarily on the largess of government, but rather began organizing their own social institutions that could provide adequate food, affordable housing, viable employment, decent health care, and protection from police brutality.

In June 1965, the MFDP, which had become the leading agent for change in Mississippi since COFO dissolved that April, organized demonstrations in Jackson demanding social justice and an end to continued voting irregularities. Complicating the situation, however, Jackson’s Black community had largely secured the movement’s original goals of dismantling discriminatory service and employment practices. With scant support from Black conservatives in the community and NAACP officials, the protests yielded little except numerous arrests. In the following months and years, Mississippi’s Black conservatives and NAACP officials, namely State President Aaron

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<sup>1</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992, revised* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 184.

<sup>2</sup> Curtis J. Austin, *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), xi.

Henry and Field Secretary Charles Evers, grew increasingly alarmed by the growing radicalism of the Mississippi Movement and the broader American Civil Rights Movement. Yet, also simultaneously critical of intransigent White Mississippi politicians, Black conservatives joined with White moderates to forge a political alliance that could undercut both extremes and therefore began to shift the state's Democratic Party more into alignment with the mainstream national party. Through the political process, Black conservatives and White moderates sought to address social and economic problems that plagued all Mississippians.

In July 1965, State President of Mississippi's AFL-CIO Claude Ramsey invited more than 100 moderate Whites and Black conservatives, including editor of the *Delta-Democrat Times* Hodding Carter III and the NAACP's Aaron Henry and Charles Evers, to form a group known as the Loyalist Mississippi Democrats. Working-class individuals, including sharecroppers, domestic servants, and day laborers, were not invited to join. With strong backing by the NAACP and black businessmen, the Loyalist Democrats, officially known as the Mississippi Democratic Conference (MDC), lobbied President Johnson for recognition as a legitimate political body, but to placate Mississippi congressmen and to retain his southern base of political support, Johnson refused. Furthermore, White Mississippians largely withheld support because of MDC's close association with the labor movement, while most African Americans preferred to side with the MFDP. Undeterred, in August 1965, members of the MDC organized a group known as the Mississippi Young Democrats to mobilize young political moderates in the state. MFDP members attempted to elect its members into leadership positions of the Young Democrats, but the national party recognized only former MDC members and



their allies as legitimate.<sup>3</sup> Although it initially failed to unseat the state's racist delegation within the National Democratic Party, the MDC/Young Democrats political entity succeeded in undermining the MFDP. Black conservatives and White moderates continued over the late 1960s to work towards exercising greater influence in the Democratic Party, presumably to improve the lives of all Mississippians, but in reality they sought to address the needs of middle-class Mississippians to the detriment of impoverished African Americans and wealthy White racists.

Meanwhile, militant Mississippians, primarily impoverished African Americans and their allies of the MFDP and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), increasingly sought to secure their conception freedom, or control over their social and economic destinies, by forging new social institutions independent of white liberals and intransigent state politicians. Historian Chana Kai Lee wrote that ardent SNCC organizer Fannie Lou Hamer believed in "self-determination [or] the notion that an oppressed community should express its collective ability to direct its own destiny" and, therefore, helped organize several self-reliance projects in impoverished Mississippi Delta communities.<sup>4</sup> Inspired by the organizing efforts of Hamer, SNCC and the MFDP, forty-five cotton day laborers, domestic servants, and tractor drivers in April 1965 formed the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union in the Delta community of Shaw. Members went on strike throughout that year to demand a minimum hourly wage of \$1.25, sick pay, health and accident insurance, and working conditions equal to those of whites. As in other instances of civil rights protest activity, Klan members and White businessmen

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<sup>3</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 346-49.

<sup>4</sup> Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 121.

intimidated, fired, or attacked protesters. With the onset of winter in 1965 and lacking food, clothing, money, and shelter, most members left the Freedom Labor Union, which subsequently dissolved, and returned to White-owned plantations in order to stave off starvation for them and their families.<sup>5</sup>

Although linked to President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty," the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM) represented a major attempt at community-driven uplift. Sargent Shriver, head of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), directed federal funding to CDGM, which enabled local community members and MFDP veterans to provide a preschool education, two hot meals a day, and healthcare to impoverished Black youths as part of the burgeoning federal Head Start Project. By the start of the first session in July 1965, eighty-four centers served fifty-six hundred youth. Unfortunately, like other individuals involved with community uplift, individuals associated with CDGM experienced economic reprisals, police harassment, and Klan intimidation.<sup>6</sup>

A more serious threat to CDGM, however, came from Mississippi leaders and federal officials themselves. Dittmer explains convincingly that, "unable to keep the poverty program out of Mississippi, White leaders moved to control [the allocation of funds]."<sup>7</sup> Leroy Percy, a wealthy Delta planter, and Owen Cooper, an industrialist, formed an alternative non-profit corporation for poverty-education programs called Mississippi Action for Progress, Inc (MAP). Its twelve-man board, including White

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 122-29, 135.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 328-29.

<sup>7</sup> John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 388.

moderates such as Hodding Carter and the NAACP's Charles Evers and Aaron Henry, lobbied the OEO successfully to shift funds away from the CDGM over to MAP centers. OEO officials were under pressure by Lyndon Johnson to placate Senator John Stennis, a ranking member of the Senate Appropriation Committee that controlled funding for the War on Poverty and the Vietnam War, who denounced the CDGM as radical and inefficient. Soon after, OEO furthermore ordered all Head Start funds and personnel transferred to MAP centers. Although CDGM limped along for a few years, it finally dissolved in December 1967, and, as a final insult, President Johnson in 1968 severely slashed Head Start and other anti-poverty programs in Mississippi to secure further funds for the Vietnam War.<sup>8</sup>

In the broader Civil Rights Movement of the late 1960s, efforts by urban northern and western Black communities to address continuing powerlessness, now assisted by staff from the increasingly radicalized SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), also prompted a severe backlash from white communities and the federal government. Protesting substandard housing, unmet demands for meaningful employment, and protection from police brutality, several race riots, starting with the August 1965 Watts riot in Los Angeles, broke out in northern and western urban centers from 1965 to 1968. Yet, instead of prompting the government to alleviate the conditions within urban ghettos, political and civic leaders decried the rioting as lawlessness and ordered police to quell the uprisings. By the spring of 1966, most SNCC and CORE staff were utterly distrustful of the federal government and such moderate civil rights organizations as the NAACP. Members increasingly criticized President Johnson,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 368-82.

particularly over his handling of the Vietnam War, and openly rejected nonviolence and integration as viable strategies for community-led social uplift.<sup>9</sup>

Back in Mississippi, the tenuous relationship between moderate and militant civil rights activists weakened further over the emergence of the Black Power ethos. Beginning on June 4, 1966, University of Mississippi graduate James Meredith began a march from Memphis to Jackson in an effort to inspire other Black Mississippians to overcome their fears and to assert their right to vote. The next day, and only ten miles into his march, Klansman Aubrey James Norvell emerged from some bushes and shot Meredith in his back with a load of birdshot, wounding him. The NAACP's Roy Wilkins, Martin Luther King, Jr. of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the newly appointed chairmen Floyd McKissick of CORE and Stokely Carmichael of SNCC, quickly agreed to continue the Meredith March Against Fear. Yet, Carmichael and McKissick wanted to use the march as a platform to criticize the Johnson administration for its limited intervention into the continuing social and economic problems that plagued Black communities, much to the chagrin of King and Wilkins. After marchers stopped in Greenwood on June 16 to pitch their tents for the night, Carmichael ignored police demands not to do so and was arrested. Before a large rally that night, Carmichael forcefully and repeatedly called for the crowd to demand "Black

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<sup>9</sup> Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, 185-87, 191, 194-95; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 183-84, 186-87, 191; Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 371-77.

Power.” On June 26, marchers reached Jackson where 15,000 demonstrators and Jackson’s Black community heard speeches from major leaders that afternoon.<sup>10</sup>

Historian Clayborne Carson identified “Black Power” as a political slogan that combined a “racial term that previously held negative connotations with a goal that always had been beyond the reach of Black people as a group.”<sup>11</sup> Intentionally ambiguous as a concept, the “Black Power” ethos quickly pervaded the culture of impoverished Black communities and helped to inspire black Americans to take pride in their racial identity and aroused their political consciousnesses to demand control over their communities. Yet, Dittmer points out that “White Americans quickly came to see Black Power as a threat” and increasingly refused to accept their struggle as a legitimate struggle for freedom.<sup>12</sup> Anti-White connotations of Black Power reinforced anxieties among White Americans that “racial equality would come at the expense of the safety of [their] neighborhoods and schools [and] the security of [their] jobs and homes.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, criticism of capitalism and the Vietnam War undercut support from the federal government, which increasingly worked to erode the legitimacy of the continuing Black struggle by labeling activists as radicals and by arresting many of them.<sup>14</sup>

Harvard Sitkoff suggests convincingly that “Black Power, like the [race] riots, brought important psychological gains for Blacks at the cost of further polarizing the races, sanctioning the cult of violence, and fueling the White backlash.”<sup>15</sup> Unlike their

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<sup>10</sup> Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, 194-95, 198-200; Dittmer, *Local People*, 402.

<sup>11</sup> Carson, *In Struggle*, 209.

<sup>12</sup> Dittmer, *Local People*, 397.

<sup>13</sup> Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, 210-11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-08; Carson, *In Struggle*, 208-11.

<sup>15</sup> Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, 194.

counterparts in 1964, officials presiding over the 1968 Democratic National Convention agreed not to seat any segregationist delegation and invited an integrated coalition of Whites, NAACP delegates, and MFDP members to serve as Mississippi's official delegation, but after the convention, party leaders purged MFDP members from any remaining leadership positions within the Democratic Party.<sup>16</sup> America's White power structure had gradually dismantled most overt barriers to the franchise, allowed for unfettered use of public facilities and services, and created new employment opportunities for Black Americans; but together with Black moderates, it did not feel compelled to ensure meaningful social justice for impoverished Black communities and, therefore, limited the pace of social change.

This study examined the civil rights movement in Jackson, Mississippi, as an extended historical process. By not focusing largely on the most turbulent and well-publicized periods of civil rights protest, scholars can gain a more complicated understanding of how grassroots movements shift over time. Similarly, racial identity did not dictate exclusively how White and Black Mississippians responded to the unfolding Civil Rights Movement. Conflicting and shifting motivations shaped the nature, extent, and pace by which Black and Whites challenged or protected status quo discrimination. As such, the Jackson Movement began as early as 1955 and continued into the 1960s, eventually securing most of its original demands, but class interests increasingly limited the pace of social change in Jackson and in the broader Mississippi Movement.

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<sup>16</sup> Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 341.

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