

APPENDIX E
"The Right to Vote" in Mississippi

Official registration figures show that only some 20,000 Negroes are registered in Mississippi as compared to 500,000 whites. This represents less than 7% of the 435,000 Negroes of voting age in the state.

(The following are selected passages from a speech by Professor Russell H. Barrett of the University of Mississippi, entitled "Voting Qualifications in Mississippi"):

"...The present voting laws of Mississippi were intended to be discriminatory... These requirements have their origin in constitutional amendments which were implemented by the legislature in 1955 and 1962, and in both cases public officials carefully avoided making statements which could be used in court actions as proof of intention to discriminate. In 1954 Governor White did say that the amendment would "tend to maintain segregation," but in 1962 Representative Thompson McClellan urged legislators to avoid asking "unnecessary questions" about the legislation in public and there was no debate on the obvious purpose of the legislation in either year.

"The newspapers and the Citizens' Council were less discreet, and they were relied upon to provide whatever explanation the voters may have needed. In October, 1954, Robert B. Patterson is reported to have said at a Citizens' Council meeting, "The amendment is intended solely to limit Negro registration." The Jackson Daily News copied a statement by Patterson as an editorial, and its story on the election results carried the headline, "Constitutional Amendment to Restrict Negro Voting Given 19-1 Lead at Polls." During the campaign on the moral character amendment in 1960 the Jackson State-Times editorialized, "This proposed amendment is not aimed at keeping white people from voting, no matter how morally corrupt they may be. It is an ill-disguised attempt to keep qualified Negroes from voting; and as such, it should not have the support of the people of Mississippi." When the legislature got around to implementing the new requirement in 1962, a news report stated that the new laws "are intended to make it more difficult for Negroes to register."...

"First, the whole pattern of voting requirements and of the registration form is calculated to make the process appear to the voter to be a hopelessly formidable one. The pattern is supposed to bristle with complexities which culminate in the publication of the would-be voter's name in the local newspaper for two weeks. A major purpose of all this is to so overwhelm the voter that he will not have the audacity even to attempt registration. Behind this approach is supposed to be - and all too often is - a collection of fears that someone will challenge the voter's moral character, that he may be prosecuted for perjury, or that he may be subjected to economic or other pressures if he attempts to register. Those who have for years controlled state politics assume that this fear will be a powerful weapon against voter registration, yet the plain fact is that it is by far the most vulnerable of their defenses....

"A second important point is that the law provides no clear or meaningful standards for its highly general requirements. These now familiar generalities require the voter to be able to explain any section of the constitution, to describe the obligations of citizenship, and to demonstrate to the Circuit Clerk that he is of good moral character. It is clear that those requirements were stated vaguely for one simple reason, to permit the Registrar to apply different standards to different people.

"... It is worth quoting what was said in 1955 by the man who was then President of the Mississippi Circuit Clerks' Association, Rubel Phillips. In complaining about the burden placed by the new law on circuit clerks, he said, "Many clerks feel the law is discriminatory and that a burden is placed on them to disfranchise many persons who have been voting for years. ... Lawyers with less than 10 years of experience probably wouldn't be able to answer the questions properly...."

The FREEDOM REGISTRATION drive is designed to show that thousands of Negroes want to become registered voters. The Freedom Registration forms, which are similar to many in current use in the North, are much simpler than those used by the State of Mississippi. The forms demonstrate what we think to be the only necessary requirements for voting. People do NOT have to be able to read and write in order to register on the Freedom Registration books. Registrars will fill out the forms for those who cannot read and write as they answer the questions. Such people will sign with "X's" in the presence of at least two witnesses. The following is a copy of the questions asked on the Freedom Registration Form:

- (1) Write today's date: _____
- (2) Write your full name: _____
- (3) How old are you today: _____
- (4) Are you a United States citizen: _____
- (5) How long have you lived in Mississippi: _____
- (6) What county do you live in: _____
- (7) How long have you lived in that county: _____
- (8) What is your address now: _____
- (9) Are you a minister or the wife of a minister: _____

All of the statements above are true: _____
(signature of applicant)

State of Mississippi, County of: _____

Sworn to and subscribed before me by the above named _____

_____ on this, the _____ day of _____, 196_____.

Negro Voters by District and County

(The following statistics are from the Congressional Quarterly, Week ending July 5, 1963, p. 1091 -3.)

First District (Northeast)

County	Negro Pop. Over 21	Negro Regis. Voters	Percent
Alcorn	1,750	61	3.5 %
Attala	4,262	61	1.4 %
Calhoun	1,767	0	0.0 %
Chickasaw	3,054	0	0.0 %
Choctaw	1,105	10	.9 %
Clay	4,444	10	.2 %
Itawamba	463	47	10.2 %
Lee	5,130	231	4.5 %
Lowndes	8,362	70	.8 %
Monroe	5,610	9	.2 %
Noxubee	5,172	0	0.0 %
Oktibbeha	4,592	107	2.2 %
Pontotoc	1,519	6	.4 %
Prentiss	1,070	18	1.7 %
Tishomingo	359	6	1.7 %
Webster	1,174	2	.2 %
Winston	3,611	57	1.6 %

Second District (Northwest):

Benton	1,419	150	10.5 %
Bolivar	15,939	612	3.8 %
Carroll	2,704	3	.1 %
Coahoma	14,404	1,800	12.3 %
DeSoto	6,246	4	.06%
Grenada	4,323	61	1.4 %
Holmes	8,757	41	.5 %
Humphreys	5,561	2	.04%
Issaquena	1,081	0	0.0 %
Lafayette	3,239	134	4.1 %
Leflore	13,567	268	1.9 %
Marshall	7,163	90	1.2 %
Montgomery	2,627	11	.4 %
Panola	7,250	2	.03%
Quitman	5,673	435	7.6 %
Sharkey	3,125	3	.1 %
Sunflower	13,524	164	1.2 %
Tallahatchie	6,483	5	.07%
Tate	4,326	0	0.0 %
Tippah	1,281	176	13.7 %
Tunica	5,822	22	.4 %
Union	1,626	6	.4 %
Washington	20,619	2,563	12.4 %
Yalobusha	2,441	4	.2 %

County	Negro pop. over 21	Negro Regis. Voters	Percent
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Third District (Southwest):

Adams	9,340	1,050	11.2 %
Amite	3,560	1	.03%
Claiborne	3,969	50	1.2 %
Copiah	6,407	20	.31%
Franklin	1,842	146	7.9 %
Hinds	36,133	5,000	13.8 %
Jefferson	3,540	0	0.0 %
Lincoln	3,913	516	13.2 %
Pike	6,936	207	3.0 %
Walthall	2,490	3	.1 %
Warren	10,726	1,100	10.3 %
Wilkinson	4,120	110	2.7 %
Yazoo	8,719	178	2.1 %

Fourth District (Central):

Clarke	2,988	34	1.1 %
Jasper	3,675	6	.20%
Kemper	3,221	10	.3 %
Lauderdale	11,924	1,200	10.1 %
Leake	3,397	150	4.4 %
Madison	10,366	500	4.8 %
Neshoba	2,565	8	.3 %
Newton	3,018	32	1.1 %
Rankin	6,944	43	.6 %
Scott	3,752	28	.7 %
Simpson	3,186	61	1.9 %
Smith	1,293	24	1.9 %

Fifth District (Southeast):

Forrest	7,495	24	.2 %
George	580	13	2.2 %
Jones	7,427	872	11.7 %
Lamar	1,071	0	0.0 %
Marion	3,630	400	11.0 %
Pearl River	2,473	0	0.0 %
Perry	1,140	127	11.1 %
Stone	868	41	4.5 %
Greene	859	40	4.6 %
Wayne	2,556	0	0.0 %