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STATEMENT BY JULIAN BOND
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Mr. Lewis and I went to Mississippi on the VEP tour to give encouragement to black people to register and vote, but we come home both inspired and encouraged by what we have seen.

In a state where there has been a violent history of black oppression, we saw some dramatic changes which have come about in recent years. In towns where we might once have been harassed or arrested as "Freedom Riders, outside agitators, and troublemakers," we were received with official police escorts.

In one town where a black man was shot in recent years for attempting to register to vote, we were welcomed by the white mayor. In another town, we addressed a black mass meeting in the county court house -- a building which has long been a symbol of white dominance over blacks.

Since the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer, the people and the problems of Mississippi have been out of the headlines and many of us may have forgotten about the black movement there. But, despite the lack of national attention, blacks have continued their struggle in what seems to be an almost underground movement.

Black voter registration figures have increased tenfold since 1965. There are currently 92 black elected officials in Mississippi and, with over 200 black candidates currently running for public office, that number is certain to be increased in this year's election.

However, Mississippi is not yet the Promised Land. Violence, both physical and institutional, still marks Mississippi as one of the most openly racist states in the nation.

The cause for hope is that blacks are becoming politically conscious and sophisticated. Through the power of the ballot, they may yet become the agents of their own liberation.