

Voter Education Project, Inc.
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, April 19, 1971

Note: The following is the text
of a telegram sent by John Lewis,
Executive Director of VEP, to
Attorney General John Mitchell.

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Mr. Attorney General:

I have just returned to Atlanta from a two-day visit to the state of Mississippi and have concluded, after extensive discussion with black and white community leaders, that the re-registration process currently being conducted in over 20 counties violates the letter and spirit of the 1965 and 1970 Voting Rights Act.

In these counties, the voting lists are being purged and everyone is being required to re-register. It seems clear that the intent of this action, and certainly the effect, is to roll back the advances which black Mississippians have made in their efforts to obtain the right to vote during recent years. Since the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the number of blacks registered to vote in Mississippi has increased from 28,000 to approximately 280,000.

Section Five of the Voting Rights Acts of 1965 and 1970 requires the state of Mississippi to submit to your office for prior approval any changes they propose to make in the election laws of that state. This requirement was intended specifically to prevent efforts, under the guise of new or modified laws, to deprive black voters of their right to vote.

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We are informed that many of the counties requiring re-registration have not submitted such changes to your office. Furthermore, we do not understand how your office could allow such changes, whether submitted to you or not.

The concern of the Voter Education Project is to make registering to vote as simple as possible. When obstacles are deliberately placed in the path of people who have too long been disfranchised, it is the duty of the Justice Department to stop such unconstitutional and unjust forces.

Today, I urge you to utilize the power of your office and review the complaints of the re-registration procedures of the following Mississippi counties:

Alcorn, Clarke, Copiah, Greene,
Hancock, Hinds, Humphreys, Jasper,
Lafayette, Lamar, Lincoln, Madison,
Noxubee, Pike, Pontotoc, Sharkey,
Union, Warren, Winston, and Yazoo.

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The Voter Education Project, Inc., is a non-partisan organization and endorses no particular candidates, but supports projects of voter registration, citizenship education, and technical assistance for elected officials in the 11 southern states.