



APROPOS

By Emile Comar

Non-voters fireworks

Under a blistering sun, some 10,000 persons stood Sunday to hear speakers demand the ballot for Mississippi's Negroes.

It was a cry for freedom, for an end to discrimination at the registrar's office and ballot box. And, whatever else you might wish to believe about it, it was dramatic.

The march was so dramatic, in fact, that there probably is not a country in the world which has not heard of it through its press facilities, whether free or controlled.

The march was praised for its purpose, condemned in some quarters for the manner in which it was executed, ridiculed, held up as an example of the greatest freedom movement of the civil rights drive.

FROM ALL THE stories, telecasts, and broadcasts one central theme stuck with the reader or viewer. That is the fact that there are hundreds of thousands of persons who still cannot exercise the freedom which will be proclaimed with unfurled banners July 4.

At New Orleans since June 1 there has been building a story less dramatic than that which is taking place in Mississippi but which can be far more tragic in its ramifications.

Perhaps the first chapter of the story was written on Saturday, May 21, when 200 persons gathered at Raboun public school for "Operation Registration," an all-day workshop designed to kick off a mass voter registration drive in New Orleans.

There was a note of optimism at this point for several reasons.

First, there was the obvious enthusiasm of the 200 White and Negro workshop participants who showed up, and many of them represented large political, civic and business organizations.

A host of public officials, including at least two city councilmen, appeared to encourage registration of voters under a citywide program to be coordinated by the League of Women Voters.

There was, too, a fertile field to plow since there were 150,000 persons in New Orleans eligible to vote who were not on the rolls.

Probably most heartening was the fact there was at the workshop no outcry for registration of Negroes as opposed to Whites or Whites as opposed to Negroes. They were working side by side.

VERNON JORDAN, director of voter education projects for the Southern Regional council, Atlanta, spoke and endorsed "Operation Registration," saying it was the first time he had participated in such an integrated effort. His previous drives had been among Negroes.

On June 26, the day the Mississippi marchers reached their goal at Jackson, the League of Women Voters took stock.

With the cooperation of many assessors, old political figures and new, interested citizens, PTA groups, the YMBC, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the League for Good Government, Negro ministers, and a long array of other groups and individuals, they had on June 1 opened a door-to-door campaign to urge the unregistered to get out and get on the rolls.

The June 26 tally showed this result:
From June 1 through June 7 a total of 167

persons registered — 84 White and 83 Negro.

From June 8 to June 15, 250 registered—
152 White and 98 Negro.

From June 16 to June 22, 323 registered
—196 White and 127 Negro.

Why not more? One league worker said the answer was simple — that people were unwilling to get up off their apathy and into one of the three registration centers located in New Orleans.

Last August Negroes were asking for federal registrars in New Orleans and Whites were denouncing such a proposal. Now neither White nor Negro adults seem to care one way or the other about their right to vote.

Both this column and the League of Women Voters have voiced criticism in the past of voter registrar A. P. "Tim" Gallinghouse for apparent slowdowns in registrations during Negro drives.

But the criticism now must be laid at the doorstep of the citizens who refuse to exercise the freedom demanded for them and by them.

WITHIN THE NEXT five months two seats in the Congress (one in the House and the other in the Senate) will be decided by VOTERS; the people of the state (at least the registered voters of the state) will say whether or not a governor of Louisiana will be permitted to seek re-election to succeed himself to office; judges will be seated — again by the VOTERS — on benches of the civil district court and traffic courts.

Because registration books by law are opened and closed for certain periods prior to and immediately following elections, there are only 30 registration days left between now and the November general election.

At the rate the eligible voters are approaching the registrar's offices, 1500 will register between now and the general election. That's ONE PER CENT of the total estimated unregistered adult population.

And where are the 99?

Out shooting firecrackers to celebrate their freedom and independence, of course.

CLARION

Published weekly, except first week in July and fourth week in December, for the people of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

June 30, 1966

CLARION Herald, New Orleans