

GREENVILLE, S. C.
NEWS

D. 92,500 S. 99,500

SEP 29 1976

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Voter Registration Urged Of Blacks

By LUCY EMERSON
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"Registering to vote should be as easy as getting a drink of water, but it's so hard," said John Lewis, a long-time black civil rights champion and one of the first Freedom Riders.

Lewis, who was arrested 40 times in the 1960s demonstrating for civil rights, spoke at a press conference in Greenville as part of a two-day tour of the state aimed at stimulating black voter registration.

The state tour is co-sponsored by the Voter Education Project (VEP), of which Lewis is the executive director, and the South Carolina NAACP, headed by Issaic Williams.

Both advocates of black political involvement will speak at rallies, press conferences, evening mass meetings and on university and college campuses from Charleston to Greenville, to encourage voter registration before the registration deadline Oct. 2.

The tour, part of a larger drive by the VEP, will take Lewis and his co-workers through 11 southern states.

Lewis said he and his co-workers found that 80 per cent of the students at a community college in Mississippi were not registered to vote in the Nov. 2 presidential election.

"The students, black and white, told us we were the first people to talk to them about registering," he said. "The federal government needs to do more to make it simple and easy to vote."

"It's really frightening that blacks fought so hard for the vote 11 years ago, some were even killed for it, and now this generation of young black Americans don't take the vote seriously," Lewis said.

"Blacks throughout the country are ready for a change in our government. They are ready for the tide to turn," Williams said. "If we get the people to the polls we will get the right answer in Washington."

Lewis said the voter education project is not connected to any party. "The candidate who appeals to that segment of the South that has been left out, will get the southern black vote," he said.