

# **A Community Meeting on Race Relations in Ruleville, Mississippi**

**June 27, 1997**

Prepared by the Central Regional Office  
on behalf of the Mississippi Advisory Committee  
to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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## **Mississippi Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights**

**Dr. Jerry W. Ward, Jr.,** *Chairperson*  
Ridgeland

**Mr. Benjamin Wade Allen III**  
Jackson

**Mr. Willie H. Foster**  
Hattiesburg

**Senator Alice V. Harden**  
Jackson

**Ms. Suzanne Griggins Keys**  
Jackson

**Mr. James H. Lott**  
Greenville

**Ms. Lisa Binder Milner**  
Jackson

**Mr. Tommy Aaron Morris**  
Jackson

**Mr. Leslie G. Range**  
Jackson

**Ms. Thelma Brown Rush**  
Vicksburg



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*A community meeting convened by the Central Regional Office on behalf of the Mississippi Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The meeting was held on June 27, 1997, at 6:00 p.m. at the Ruleville Community House, Ruleville, Mississippi, with Mississippi Advisory Committee Chairperson Dr. Jerry W. Ward, Jr., presiding. Also attending the meeting were Commission Chairperson Dr. Mary Frances Berry and Central Regional Director Mr. Melvin L. Jenkins.*

## Proceedings

**Dr. Ward.** Thank you. My name is Jerry Ward and I chair the Mississippi Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. I would like to welcome all of you to this followup meeting we are having here in Ruleville to hearings that were conducted last summer in Cleveland. We think it's very important that we do have followup on our hearings, so that we can know indeed if we have had some impact on awakening consciousness, or no impact at all, and what is the nature of change that might have taken place since we were last in this area, dealing with problem of burning of churches. Again, that will be our focus. Dr. Mary Frances Berry, who is Chairperson of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, will be speaking to you briefly about that.

To my right is Mr. Melvin Jenkins who is the director of the Central Regional Office for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in Kansas City, Kansas, and he will probably have some very important things to say to us too. So without spending any further time on the matter of introduction, I would like to yield the floor to Dr. Berry.

**Commissioner Berry.** Thank you very much Dr. Ward, I just want to tell you how grateful we are to you for being Chair of the State Advisory Committee and for organizing the meeting last year and this year and all the other work that you do. That's the first thing.

And the second thing I want to tell you is the reason why we're late, and we're really sorry, is we must have got lost because we saw you in Jackson. We got here as fast as we could. We drove from Jackson. We had not planned to go to Jackson today, but I had asked for a meeting with the Governor because Dr. Ward had been trying to get a meeting with the Governor for his State Advisory Committee since last October. He had written to the Governor and had gotten no response from that. He had repeatedly asked

for a meeting, and so I had Mr. Jenkins inform the Governor's office the other day that I was coming, and wanted to meet with the Governor along with the SAC Chair to talk about race relations in Mississippi. The Governor's office agreed the day before yesterday to the meeting. So we had to change our schedule to go to Jackson before we came here. So we had to drive over there and then drive over here, and that's why we're late, and so we apologize to everybody for being late, but happy we got here, and the meeting was well worth it.

There have been 14 church fires in Mississippi that were reported to the National Arson Church Fire Task Force, and only 4 of them by last count—let me make sure that's right—were solved. One, two, three, four, five, where there were arrests made, and not the ones here in Ruleville. But last year Mr. Ingram, who is the State Commissioner of Public Safety, testified at the church fire forum and he said that it was likely that they would solve all of them, and he talked very optimistically at that time about solving them.

Today he told us that, when I pointed out to him that they hadn't been solved, that he still was optimistic about getting solved, and that in at least two of the cases they know who did them, but they don't have enough evidence to indict the person. So that's an issue that is raised.

The other thing that we talked to the Governor about was race relations in general in Mississippi, and in the Delta in particular, because the Civil Rights Commission was here in March and had a hearing in Greenville, over on the Delta, regarding education, voting rights, higher education, K through 12 education, employment opportunity, and you name it, in the Mississippi Delta. Our staff is preparing a big report from that hearing, which is going to come out on the Mississippi Delta sometime in the fall or the

winter. There will be a big report with findings and recommendations. So we asked the Governor a lot of questions. One, whether there was any dialogue on race going on in Mississippi, and what did he think about the idea of having local and statewide conversations on race.

The Governor indicated that he didn't see anything wrong with that, although he didn't say that he was about to organize any. I pointed out to the Governor that Mississippi does not have a human rights commission, and that was discussed last year at the church fire forums. There are only about six States that do not have one. I pointed out to him that race issues are involved, but it's also an issue of sex discrimination and disability discrimination.

I mean, why do people have to file charges in Atlanta—Atlanta is in Georgia—if they live in Mississippi?

And so he said that he—he promised me—I made him promise—I asked him to promise and he promised that he would consider doing so, and for the first time in Mississippi. And I also got him to promise that he would have his education advisors look into the school situation in Tunica, because I've had people complaining to me that with the takeover there, while they say they're working on corruption and all that, they aren't doing anything about improving the schools or anything about the quality of education.

And so I pointed out to him that I thought that when the State takes over, the State has the responsibility, if it's going to take over something, to make sure that the kids are getting a better education. We went back and forth on that one, and he said that the State has a general responsibility for the schools. I said yes, I know that, but I'm talking specifically when you take over something, you know, you took it over. That meant you made it your own, and so it's not that you have an indirect responsibility, and I pointed out to him that around the country we have people taking over black schools where a lot of black children go. New Jersey, they've got some; California; and in most cases they haven't done anything to improve the schools.

So he promised that he would have his educational people take particular interest and report back to him on what they are going to improve the schools, and he agreed with me that we could hold him accountable for that. And at the end of the discussion, since Dr. Ward was over here in

the Delta busy—I asked the Governor and the Governor agreed that he would meet with the State Advisory Committee, your Committee—

**Dr. Ward.** Good.

**Commissioner Berry.** --within 6 months for you to follow up on the items that he promised, to see how he's coming with the promises that he made. And so what we want to do here tonight is to talk with you about, and have you talk with us about, whether race relations in this area have improved, about the same, worse, and what the issues are. Is it schools? Is it jobs? Is it police? I mean, what's going on here and what is your perception, and what do you think about the fact that only five of the church fires have there been any arrests made, and here we are, this is what, a year later?

**Dr. Ward.** Yes.

**Commissioner Berry.** And some of them it's 2 years later, and they still haven't found out or who did it. So we'd like to hear from you. That's what we're here for. Mr. Jenkins, do you want to say anything?

**Mr. Jenkins.** I just simply want to recognize Dr. Beverly White, the Chair of the Arkansas Advisory Committee, who so graciously came to visit with us. She works in Jackson and she's familiar with the Delta area and involved in economic development, human rights, and the whole ball game also. And I would ask if we could just spend a minute to have her address a couple of issues on race relations from her vantage point in the Delta.

**Dr. Ward.** Dr. White.

**Dr. White.** When I speak about the Delta, I want you to be clear that it is not peculiar to the State of Mississippi. I work in three States, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. And I heard Chairperson Berry mention—and I want you to know that the problems with education of African American children is not unique to Tunica. I spend many, many miles, many, many hours in the Delta of Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana. And while each of the three States might classify underachievement of children in a different way, the issue is still that there is a great deal of disparity in achievement between African American and other students, and this is not atypical to the fact that there is anything innately inferior about the school system and equitable acquisition or sharing of resources.

It is still a fact in the Delta we have difficulty getting the necessary resources and some facilities. All you have to do is just ride around any of the towns in the Delta to look at the inadequacy of the facilities, inadequacy of the resources. We are not only 50 years behind where other school systems, not only in the region but also in the nation.

We are particularly concerned also in the Delta of the three States as it relates to the potential impact of welfare reform. There's been a lot of time spent in educating citizens, especially those who are going to be impacted, about welfare reform, but when we talk about women or men, they're required to go to work in the Delta, there are very serious issues of where will they work. If there is a job available, there is a lack of a transportation system. There is inadequate child care in this area, so those problems continue to be present.

There are issues related to affordable housing. There's still the issues of adequate health care, especially as it impacts older people and our young people, but these are just a few of the issues that we relate to, and when you start looking at it, it is a matter of both class and race. But when you look at what is the population of the Delta, you have African American people of all ages being disproportionately impacted, and many of the impacts are a result of inequitable policies and practices.

**Commissioner Berry.** You know, some people say, if I may, Dr. Ward—

**Dr. Ward.** Of course.

**Commissioner Berry.** Some people say that the problems with the schools that I keep talking about, that Mississippi schools are no worse than they are anywhere else in the country, and that in fact Mississippi used to rank at the bottom. That's the response that some of the politicians give, and Mississippi now is high up in the rankings, is not on the very bottom anymore, and that other school systems around the country have problems too. Mississippi used to be bad, but that now Mississippi is a whole lot better, and that therefore people ought to understand that it's just sort of pointing the finger at Mississippi, when you keep talking about how the problems that are here and that whatever is going on here is just the same thing that's happening everywhere else. There's nothing particular about Mississippi that anybody should even be calling attention to.

Does anybody have any comments on that? Or do you all agree with it? And when you address something, you need to state your name for purposes of the record.

**Mr. Donahoe.** I'm Mr. Edgar Donahoe, Board of Supervisors of Sunflower County. I think, yes, we've got a long way to go. We are still behind some States, but we've come a long way, and we're working hard to go further. I think right now the thing that hurts our area more in, as she said, is unemployment. We have three factories here in Ruleville. They're all garment factories. Washington and our legislatures has passed a bill for trade organizations with Mexico, by 50 percent—50 to 75 percent of the jobs out of these three plants went to Mexico. They're shipping their stuff back in here, warehousing and shipping it back out.

**Commissioner Berry.** Is that NAFTA or something else?

**Mr. Donahoe.** Yes, ma'am.

**Commissioner Berry.** NAFTA.

**Mr. Donahoe.** Yes. And yet we appeal to the government, the Board of Supervisors of Sunflower County, appeal to the Governor to allow Sunflower County, because of this unemployment rate, to pass at least 1 year on the work requirement until we get more jobs, and this was rejected by the Governor. He took the whole State—there's some things good in welfare reform, but there are many things bad, and our people in the Delta are suffering from it. Business is suffering from it. But we have brought—and when I say we, I mean the people here, my staff, everybody working together in Mississippi—sure, there's still a lot of prejudice, but prejudice is many times on both sides. But I think that if we could get industry, we have an empowerment zone in part of Sunflower County. I've been a member on the commission on this for 2 years. We haven't seen the first penny of empowerment zone in Sunflower County to date.

**Commissioner Berry.** Tell me why you think that is. This is very important stuff you're talking about. Why do you think that is, because many places empowerment zones are held out as the answer to the problem, that once you get one—

**Mr. Donahoe.** What I see from it, it's probably going to be a long-time good thing, but right now it's a lot of money being handled by a lot of people, and it's not being passed down to people. We haven't seen the first penny in Sunflower

County from it. Right now it's possible we have an announcement on new industry tomorrow that could be a result of the empowerment zone. It won't be here, but it will be in Sunflower County. A lot of jobs will be performed there.

So things are happening. It's going to be long range, but yes, I'm concerned about different things. But look, I've seen the schools. I was on the school board for 14 years now, I've been on the board of supervisors almost 16, and I've seen progress. I know what the schools were 28 years ago, 29 years ago, and I know where they are today. And I know the spirit of the schools and the spirit of the children and the people, team spirit. We're coming. We've got a long way to go, but from what I read in the newspaper, every State has got a long way to go. But the main thing we need is jobs. If you give the people of Sunflower County, the people in Ruleville, Mississippi, jobs, you won't have to worry about anything else. Sure, you've got a few out there that won't work, but the people that will work are going nowhere. They've got to go further. They're going to build better schools. They're going to build better churches.

Half of our black churches in Sunflower County, they are in some type of building program. The church out here in Dockery that burned, just moved into a church next door, right here. And you know, with open arms, and there are people that are determined that through God's will—community and their people. The church out here that burned, which Jackie would have people from both of them here—they bought a building over here behind the hospital and are renovating it. It's going to be a beautiful building.

But you give us jobs, we'll take care of the rest of it. Racism is going to take care of itself and all the people because God is against racism, and if a person loves himself, he can't hate his fellow man.

**Commissioner Berry.** Now, Mr. Donahoe, what do you think will happen if you don't get an extension on the welfare reform? You said you asked for it and they wouldn't—

**Mr. Donahoe.** Well, it's already been turned down.

**Commissioner Berry.** So what do you think is going to happen to the people?

**Mr. Donahoe.** A lot of mothers hurting. Now, we do have programs here that are trying

to get people a GED, but, look, I know I can tell you two young ladies here, about 24, 25 years old, fine ladies that have been graduated from college 2 years and haven't been able to find a \$5 an hour job. If they do it, they've got to go the Jackson or they've got to go to Memphis. They can't find it here. That's what we've got to have. Sure, education is part of it and bringing out people up. I mean, job training is part of it, but the main thing is the job being available. If it's available, we'll do the job.

I think there are many companies, Modern, one of the biggest lawn mower manufacturers in the world, about 1,100 and something people working, and you know, that was one of their questions when they came down here from up north 36 years ago, Are we going to be able to get skilled people? That's no problem. They've got skilled people, and there's a lot of people that apply that they can't use.

**Dr. Ward.** Reverend Brown, would you want to make some statements? Probably as you see things as a followup to the discussions we had last July.

**Commissioner Berry.** Or any comments you would like to make. Your church is being rebuilt, is that—

**Rev. Brown.** We're rebuilding it—the building that burned, we've already did some renovations to it. Then we took the liberty of purchasing more property, which is within the city limits, and as Mr. Donahoe stated, we are nearly to the point of completing that building. We'll be ready to move in probably within the next 4 weeks. So the incident that took place really didn't hold us back and was really a tremendous blessing to us for the fact that it encouraged us and motivated us to go ahead and do what we had to do. And many incidents leading up to that particular incident that maybe there were signs along the way indicating that it was time for us to move from that location to the present location, and so that is what we might describe, the straw that broke the camel's back, to go ahead and open our eyes to the fact that we needed to move from where we are now to where we will be next month.

**Commissioner Berry.** What's happened in the area where you were last year when you told us about what was going on there? I mean, your moving will solve your congregation's problems?

**Rev. Brown.** Yes, it will solve some of—well, I believe in general that we know, of course, you've spoken a lot about race and about a lot of other issues. I was thinking in terms of basically we were going to focus in on the church fires and basically the race relations. Of course, when we have racial problems and they have racial problems all over the country, and they are very noticeable here.

Since we last spoke last year, the incident which has taken place, such as the light which is outside of our church that was being shot out, I think maybe has happened three or four times since then, since that particular occasion that you and I had spoken. They have somewhat minimized, but they haven't completely stopped. We still have some people rioting on the bridge, which is right down from my church. We made complaints about that—very seldom, and we still have complaints that we make to the sheriff's department concerning those situations that take place out there, and the attitude has been somewhat sympathetic, but then if you really want to look at it and you want the honest to God truth, I think that is really in a sense still has kind of been brushed off. It hasn't taken the position that it needs to be taken, and I'm speaking as a pastor. I'm speaking as a leader of this community, that it hasn't gotten the attention that it should have gotten, not in this area.

**Commissioner Berry.** And also—people, you don't have to stand up when you talk. You can just sit down. You're just talking to each other. You don't have to be—sit down when you talk. We've just having this conversation here. We aren't having speech—anybody can talk who wants to, just keep talking because I feel like it.

**Unidentified Speaker.** He's a minister. He—

**Commissioner Berry.** Well, maybe ministers like to stand up when they talk, but you know, Reverend Brown, when talking to you last year, listening to you last year, has stuck in my mind all year long. This whole thing has stuck in my mind all year long and bothered me. I know there's a problem of jobs here. We heard about that last year, and I'm really sad that the empowerment zone hasn't turned out to be all it was cracked up to be either. Most things simply don't seem to turn out to be what you think is going to happen, but I'm really concerned that, one, we don't know who burned your church yet.

And two, you moving. Three, there are incidents that are still happening and we still don't know who's doing it. And yet last year we were told that law enforcement was going to see to it that prompt responses and they were going to clear up all this. I don't understand what the problem is. Once somebody says something—somebody over there said something. I heard a sound in the back—I think it was Amen or something. You can speak up. You can speak again if you want to. What did you just say about that? Speak on.

**Ms. Shipp.** My name is Daisy Shipp, and I work with the State—and there's a lot of prejudice in Ruleville, Mississippi, and I know Mr. Donahoe. He helped me get my job where I am today, and I've been there almost 11 years. But prejudice in Ruleville? Man, it will always be here. As long as you don't step on their toes, you're cool. But say something that you're speaking up for yourself, you see how many going to like you then. They're going to say you're crazy, you're stupid, you don't know nothing. But speak up for yourself and see what happens.

**Commissioner Berry.** Well, why do you think Reverend Brown's church, one, that we haven't found out who did it, and—

**Ms. Shipp.** See, I'm not a member of that church, so I can't speak on that. I mean, I could speak on that, but I have no idea. But about us moving over there, that ain't gong to stop it. They're going to come right over there and burn it down. It's taken all our money—same thing's going to happen.

**Commissioner Berry.** Did you all get any money from the National Council of Churches or the HUD loan program to help you with this?

**Rev. Brown.** No, ma'am, we have never received any funds—

**Commissioner Berry.** Did you apply for any of these funds?

**Rev. Brown.** No, ma'am, we did not apply.

**Commissioner Berry.** We need to—Melvin, you need to give him the information because you—there's a fund that the National Council of Churches put together of money for the churches that were burned, and you're suppose to apply to that so they can give you some money so that the burden of that—your congregation—maybe Mr. Donahoe knows about it.

**Mr. Donahoe.** Ms. Berry, they're very aware of that. Jackie can probably speak to it—Congressman Ben Thompson held a conference

here—Secretary of Housing—HUD was with him, and I think because their church had already been fixed back—about the other church is the—Jackie could probably speak to it. She's part of this church.

**Commissioner Berry.** Okay.

**Dr. Ward.** Jackie Buckner.

**Mr. Donahoe.** Right.

**Ms. Buckner.** I am Jackie Buckner, and I am a member of the New Mount Zion Church—other members—well, to renovate our church, the one that got burned, we had church insurance, so that kind of helped us to get back and truly, we have not found—did not receive any money from the NCAW. We just went to the bank to borrow what we need to renovate it and rebuild our new church. We are getting ready to move. We are going to move regardless, you know. This burning did not send us away, because just a month or so after that, we were right back in. We never stopped having service. We used a neighboring church, you know, to continue our service. And they say, you know, that he couldn't stop us from coming in to pray to God, but we have not received any monetary funds federally. We received a large amount from the Kenneth Copeland Ministry, and some other nice people and nice churches, nice organizations, out of the State of Mississippi.

We have not received anything community-wide—so everything we have done has been with our church tithes and our offerings, our building fund, and the money that was borrowed from the bank to help renovate this building. As Pastor Brown said, with God's help, within 4 to 6 weeks we will be moving into that building, but it's just sad, and as we talked a year ago, or 14 months ago, and we met with you all, our hearts were still with hurt and pain, but we have gone on. We have really moved on and we have—we have done good.

The congregation is increasing. We could be having service, and they would be sitting down drinking and smoking and shooting—shooting off the bridge, interrupting service, but we keep on praising Him, and we are calling the sheriff's department, police department, or sheriff's department, because they're out in the county, and they'll come out. I don't think they write any tickets, you know. They get them off for a little while, but when we leave service, they come right back, you know. So that problem has not been solved.

And the county knows it. The sheriff's department—I'm a county employee and, you know, they're aware of it going on, but I don't think—if they start fining these people, maybe, you know, they'll—they don't write any tickets.

**Dr. Ward.** Is there—probably you can answer this, is there no city ordinance—first of all, I should ask, is the church within the city limits?

**Ms. Buckner.** Our church is not.

**Dr. Ward.** It's in the county, okay. So there is no law that protects your location against repeated incidents that could be called nuisances, such as disruption of church services. If you have a hospital out there, I don't assume you allow people to shoot guns with patients in the hospital. But if it's a church, then maybe something else pertains—and what's I'm trying to figure out is if this is going to be whether you are there or move, a continuing problem, is it that the county feels it is impotent to do anything about this? And perhaps you can address that.

**Mr. Donahoe.** The responsibility of the sheriff's department—this is not—this disruption on the bridge is not all race. We had a young black man killed in the last couple of months. His father is also a county employee and a pastor here in town. And they were out shooting off the bridge, you know. So when you go out there a lot of times you see black and white. It's a gathering place. Sometimes it may be racial, but most of the times it's mixed. It's in the county and the sheriff has been called out. Any person that wanted to swear out a complaint, he would be compelled to take it and arrest that person and bring them in. But to my knowledge nobody has charged anybody with anything. But, yes, the law enforcement does have a responsibility to make sure this—and he knows that. Our sheriff himself has just got over a liver transplant, and I hope he takes more interest in this and we'll see improvement.

**Commissioner Berry.** Mr. Donahoe, I'm sorry, but I just cannot believe this, because if I in my home town had a nuisance like this going on, and somebody shooting, unless your law permits people to shoot anything they want to anytime they feel like it and disrupt anything, and I don't know the answer to that—it would not be an appropriate answer for my local representative to tell me that the police chief is ill or that something is a problem. I would say, well, I don't care what happens; I don't want anybody

out there shooting and I want you to do something about it.

Now, I know that these are complications, but it's disturbing to come back here a year after we were here to have this fire take place, to have the continued incidents take place, and whether they're racially motivated or not, and you say some of them may be and some may not, whatever, sort them out, to have people say that it's still going on, and now they're moving, for whatever reason, and then some of them feel like the same thing is going to happen to them when they move. There must be some kind of recourse that they have. I mean, to focus in on this individually—

**Mr. Donahoe.** You say you're not going to let your representative tell you, but the sheriff is elected like I am. I can't give the sheriff orders. Sometimes I'd like to, but I can't. He's elected just like I am, the same year I am. We provide a budget for the sheriff, and we hope and we think that we provide enough for protection of this county. Maybe we don't.

We are applying for more COPS grants to try to get more policemen, and it's something that people—someday somebody will get mad enough, they're going to file some charges against somebody and somebody is going to jail. It's sad that a young man has to die with a gun in his own hand on this bridge to make people wake up, but that just happened, and you know, I hope that that had an effect even on the other young people that were taking part in it.

**Dr. Ward.** About 2 months ago?

**Mr. Donahoe.** About 2 months ago, yes.

**Commissioner Berry.** Reverend Brown, has anyone filed complaint with the sheriff, asked the sheriff to identify anything or—do you know, either of you, or who knows? Do you know?

**Dr. Ward.** For the record, just identify yourself because it will go into the record.

**Mr. Johnson.** Well, if the sheriff's officers do come out there on the bridge, they won't say nothing to them anyway, because I know one night we were coming from church and one of the other law enforcements was out there and was with them drinking and stuff. They're not going to say nothing to you, so they're still not going to do nothing to you unless somebody put a sign out there or something say stop, you know, hanging on the bridge or something, because they been drinking, smoking, and stuff.

**Dr. Ward.** For my information, would you state your name, please, for us?

**Mr. Johnson.** Talmadge Johnson.

**Dr. Ward.** Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Johnson. I just want some clarification and we're not going to try to beat this to death, but I need clarification. Is the bridge a sanctioned place by custom for young people to meet and blow off steam? I mean, has the bridge been this kind of meeting place for teenagers, I would suppose, for over 5 or 6 years?

**Ms. Buckner.** An isolated place?

**Dr. Ward.** Mm-hmm.

**Ms. Buckner.** I think it's an isolated place, no officers out there, no deputies out there. They used to—and that's what—I mean, it's not all teenagers. I'm 32. There's young men my age, people that we know, black and white. It's not—they all hang there and they hang there together, but it's isolated and they know they can get drunk and high. They can do whatever they want to, you know, out there because they know nobody will come out there or they know they might check, and at one point they don't even check anymore sometimes.

And I think if our sheriff's department fines these individuals, maybe that would stop it, because when we leave our church, we're going to sell it. Somebody else is going to go through the same thing we have gone through, and it's really sad, and I don't think they're being fined. We call and say come out here. They're out here disturbing service, and there are students on the bridge. We've got signs, county sign. I'm a county employee, and they'll shoot them up. They'll tear them down, but they know it's wrong, you know, to do it, and we'll pass—we was in service heavily one Sunday, am I right, Melvin? And they were shooting. I mean, booming sounds. We're in service. No respect for the church, and that's what burns my heart, because they don't—if we're not there, that's okay, but respect does—and we're in service. Our minister is up giving us the word of God.

That's my thing. Deputies come down. They run them off. Two hours later we come in from the service, they're right back, and I know they're not fining these people. I know—we don't see anything in the paper that says they're being fined. And like I say, I am a county employee and the sheriff's officers are employed by the county, but nothing is being done.

**Commissioner Berry.** Las year there was a—we were told that the bridge was covered with graffiti that included a swastika and the letters KKK.

**Ms. Buckner.** Our county employees went and repainted them and—

**Commissioner Berry.** And it comes right back.

**Mr. Donahoe.** Jackie's husband is the assistant road manager of the county and he's responsible to keep this bridge up, and they go bankrupt trying to keep it painted, because they go and paint it right back.

It's against the law to shoot from the bridge. It's against the law to shoot from a road in Mississippi, even in deer hunting—you can't even shoot a deer from the road or a bridge. But the law say, and they're correct, in order to charge that person, they've got to see them or have a witness see them, this person shot the road—they wouldn't sign the paper. They say when they go out there, they don't find a gun or nothing. They see them coming, I guess a mile away, and they—but game wardens can arrest them. Sheriff's deputies can arrest them, anybody that knows they shot from the bridge because it's against the law. And what they're doing, they're shooting down in the water at snakes, but it's just a game for them.

**Ms. Jones.** My comment is that regardless of whether it's blacks, whites, old, or young, if people in church are so inhibited—to me their civil rights are being violated because this has something to do with worship. The fact that you're feeling uncomfortable to worship freely, so it doesn't matter if it's an old person or a young person. Whoever is infringing upon the freedom from worship, it seems to me is in violation of the rights of the parishioners. I don't understand why it wouldn't be possible to have a surveillance camera there for a period of time documenting response time, who is doing what, that kind of thing.

**Commissioner Berry.** So that intimidation, which interferes with religious freedom, is as much a civil rights violation as any other—

**Ms. Jones.** I would think.

**Commissioner Berry.** And we are in the business of being concerned about religious discrimination as well as race and other kinds of discrimination too. Well, we're going to have to—don't you think we should look into this and see

whether there is some remedy? I don't know whether there's a civil remedy, whether you could file a suit and have the police department ordered—the sheriff's department ordered to do something about this.

**Dr. Ward.** I'm not sure. I think it does need to be pursued, because any person in the community of Ruleville or Sunflower County or anyplace in this State should feel free not to have to endure years of this kind of what I consider basically harassment. But I also see it as an extremely complex problem, and I don't want to be accused of being the outsider who came to the Delta to tell you what to do with your town.

But what I'm hearing, because this problem is so complicated, is that there has not been a proper discussion of it among all the people who live in Ruleville, not just some of the people, but all the community of Ruleville; and I make this accusation—I should be corrected if it is indeed an accusation—but I'm not sensing that this community has had a sufficient conversation about it. I can say the same thing about Jackson. It's not picking on Ruleville. I can say the same thing about other cities, Vicksburg, Tunica, in this State.

So my basic point is that many of these problems, which have histories of what is—has been allowed and what has not been allowed, who is involved, a complicity of police—well, of law enforcement officers in practices that are disturbing. These things cannot be solved by just simply having another lawsuit. I think the law is there and it's a very effective instrument. However, I think there have to be genuine examinations of the kind that neither this county nor this State has been willing to have of local problems.

**Commissioner Berry.** Has anybody tried here in Ruleville or in the county since we were here the last time to try to bring together groups of people, black and white, to discuss race relations?

**Ms. Shipp.** Repeat that, ma'am.

**Commissioner Berry.** Has anyone, any public official, any church, any group of ministers, any business leaders, or whoever, tried since last time we were here in Mississippi, last year, to bring together black and white people in the community to discuss community issues or whatever we want to call it, race issues?

**Ms. Shipp.** No, ma'am.



**Commissioner Berry.** Jobs issues? Any kind of issues so that there can be an airing of views by people in the community?

**Ms. Shipp.** No, ma'am.

**Commissioner Berry.** So that people can discuss these things together? Has anybody tried to do that? Has that happened since we were here last year?

**Ms. Shipp.** No, ma'am.

**Unidentified Speaker.** No, ma'am.

**Rev. Brown.** I don't think—looking at it, it would be fruitless because not everyone feels or has experienced what we have felt. The church that was at Dockery and our church appears to be only two churches that have experienced this type dilemma, and knowing in the extreme way. Most other churches within the community have experienced very minimal effects like what we have, and therefore the leaders of those churches, the pastors of those churches, have a very low interest in things; and I wouldn't even go as far as try to contact them, because I know what the response would be automatically.

**Commissioner Berry.** You know what the response would—you do? You know what the response—

**Rev. Brown.** I know what the response would be. The church that I pastor is a relatively small church and the church at Dockery is about the same size, but the other congregations, the leaders in those churches, the interest level in something like this is very low because they have experienced very, very little effects. I mean, these type things haven't really—not the way that it happened to us, so their interest in it isn't that strong.

**Commissioner Berry.** And nobody in the white community has come forward to ask the white community to meet with the black community to discuss community issues or job issues or race issues, however you want to term it, to try to build a sense of community here, discuss these issues so that people can hear how each side feels about whatever is going on?

**Ms. Shipp.** Ma'am, the question you asked, the questions you just asked—that's not happening here in Ruleville, and I'm just being honest about it. It's just not happening. And the good that you—you think we get a chance at that? No, ma'am. We took a chance at asking jobs—there's a lot of qualified black people. I've got a degree, and I'm not stupid, you know, but

there's—the question you asked, it's not happening, and nobody giving up—[many people speaking at once from audience]—

**Commissioner Berry.** But this audience or this forum is entirely—unless I'm looking and can't see you, except for Mr. Donahoe, is entirely black, unless I'm—

**Mr. Donahoe.** Indianola has a lot more shooting and trouble than we do. It just kept at one side. Greenville, Mississippi, hardly a week goes by that there's not another person killed or murdered by the—one of their neighbors. I mean, this is going on everywhere. The answer to this is prosperity. If a person hasn't got anything else to do, they're going to go out there because they get a little recognition. But if they've got a car and a home that they're proud of and can stay home and mow their yard, they're not going to be out there. You give us jobs, and 99 percent of that's going to be taken care of. Look, we've got—Mississippi and Mississippi Delta is a good place—we've got a lot, a lot of people that's returning here that went to Chicago years ago, because they couldn't make a living.

Now they're returning here, they want to make their home here. We've got a lot to offer. We've got a warmer climate than other places, but we need jobs and if a young person 25 to 35 years old hasn't got work to do and hasn't got something that he can call his own, he's going to look for things like that, and you can move it from there, and it's going to move over here. And until we can get people some security to where they can have something and not be ashamed to ask a young lady to go to a movie with him or take her out to a hamburger because he hasn't got \$5 or \$20 or whatever it takes, you know, he's going to lower his self-image, and he's going to go to things like that. And whether it's the bridge or the street up here, where the whiskey stores are or what not, it's going to go on if you haven't got something for people to feel like that they're bettering themselves.

**Dr. Ward.** Well, shouldn't this be the discussion in Ruleville? How do we get—how does this total community economically empower itself? I've heard you say—and I'm very touched by this—give us jobs and we can have a better situation. Give us jobs, give us jobs. You know, I'm kind of radical about some things. Nobody is going to give you a job. Let me tell you that nobody is going to give you a job. When people

wanted what was very precious to them 30 some years ago, which was called freedom, they marched. I don't know why it is that we are so slow that if we need jobs, that somebody should march on the Department of Labor and have a sit-in at the White House and say nobody works here until we do. It would be a major embarrassment to the country, but if you are sincere about this being the salvation for your community, I don't advise you to be that radical, but you have to do something that lets the rest of the State and this nation know that you're not just sitting down saying I want a job to fall out of heaven, because it's not going to come. I'm telling you that. Dr. White?

**Dr. White.** I just wanted to ask Dr. Ward what he was saying—I want you to state where I work. I work for an organization which is based in Jackson, and as you mentioned earlier, we work in the three States, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. We convene people from all over these three States to address issues of economic development, work force development, issues such as you've been discussing tonight, that affect families with children. And what we hear coming from people like those of you who are gathered here today, we just left Greenville today, is that until we as a people, a community such as Ruleville, cannot change unless the people who live in that community are willing to come together across those traditional barriers of race, or class, of gender, and even geographical boundaries. So what I hear Dr. Ward saying and what we are saying also, a job will not drop out of the sky. We know that historically when there's a disproportionate number of minority people, the factories, the plants are going to go someplace else.

So it's going to mean that people who will come together and begin to talk about and develop strategies for a media rating, those problems—or getting rid of those problems that exist in that community. And as long as people stay on one side of the track, and say ain't it awful, whether you are the affluent side of the track or you're the poor side of the track, nothing is going to change until the groups decide that they are going to come together, and that I think is the issue. It has to do with church burnings. It has to do with economic development and jobs in the community. It has to do with the quality of housing, the quality of the infrastructures in the

community, and until the community can come together, these things won't change.

**Commissioner Berry.** How can you get the community to come together? I guess that's the question. We have—I mean, everybody agrees that—I assume everybody here agrees—everybody was shaking their heads, nodding up and down, when Mr. Donahoe was talking about jobs. Everybody was going mm-hmm, so everybody was agreeing. Everybody agrees with what you say, Dr. White, about economic development, and about community, but how do we get the whole community in Ruleville, in Sunflower County, in the Delta, in Mississippi, how do we get the community across race and class lines to come together to talk about economic development in the areas that need economic development like this one? And economic development for everybody, and not just bringing in industry, that's one thing, but also strategies where people can become entrepreneurs in their own right, by having small amounts of money to set up businesses themselves, and to sell and buy from each other, and other strategies like that? How do we do that? How do we get that to happen as a community enterprises?

**Mr. Donahoe.** Let me say again, I think that you are getting the impression that we are sitting on our laurels waiting for somebody to fall out of the sky. That's not necessarily true. The chamber of commerce here in the years—up to—couple years were very active. We sweated blood to get the two common interests—we got State grants. We got county and city money, loans. We got those things. We had over 800 jobs right across the railroad. Now there are less than 150 because legislation was passed to give it to Mexico. All right. I think that's kind of discouraging the people in a way, but people have got to wake up. We have a chamber of commerce banquet every year, and it's advertised in all the rest of the stores and tickets for sale.

You generally have less than 30 people show up for it. We've got to—like you say, we've got to quit complaining. We've got—Sunflower County Economic Development Committee people serve from all over the county on that free of charge. I served on the work force committee for 2 years and it got to where it was taking as much as 12, 13 hours a month, which, you know, with other duties that I had, I just didn't have time, but I still support that program. It's not Federal

money—most of it is money that's been donated by foundations and put here because people are residents here and it's a good program.

But I think that we've got to—in the first place, as Daisy said a while ago, they—we are they, you know. We've got to quit arguing and saying, Well, what can we do? What can you do to help me? What can I do to help you? We've got to help each other.

How that comes about? You know, I haven't got an answer. I've been trying for a long time, and I've failed, but we do have progress here. We've got—Daisy said, she's got a big WIC warehouse here that wasn't here 8 or 9 years ago. We've got a new welfare office, new health department that wasn't here. This was our little health department—renovated and it was—you know, it was falling down. After we got it—we got away from the State and put county money into it—social service in the back.

We have a big Sunflower store that doubled in size. We have a new black-owned restaurant out on the highway which is doing great. You can go here and you can go into most any restaurant at lunch, you find black and whites in our restaurants here. You can find all demanding to buy hamburgers and French fries. We are making progress. Sure, we're not satisfied and we wouldn't be human if we were, you know, but we're never going to be satisfied, because we want the best we can get, and we're going to get it.

But right now one thing is hurting as far as industry is the empowerment zone. If industry is planning on coming here, it is not coming to Ruleville, Mississippi. They go where they're getting \$3 an hour exemption on every employee they hire for 2 years, get \$3,000 income tax off the top of their income tax. That's where they're going and they're not coming, you know—empowerment zone is good for some areas; it's hurt to others. But when there's a new factory down there, we're going to get our share of the jobs. We've got a lot of people here. If we didn't have Parchman up here, if we didn't have Modern, then we would be hurting. But we are growing, but we're still not satisfied and until we can put every man on the street that wants to work, we're not going to be satisfied. We're going to work for it.

**Ms. Buckner.** Ms. Chair, I want to try and answer the question about where do we start. I think it needs to start locally, with our mayor and

our board of aldermen. I feel that they need to—they see the need for what we need in Ruleville. They see what we need and I think they need to get together and say, Well, look, we have a problem on this side of the tracks. As the—we have a problem. They need to bring us together, and I think that's where we need to start. That's locally. Then if we need to go to the county level, a lot of things countywide that needs to be changed. We have a leadership Sunflower County going on right now. I'm a member of the Crossroads Program, and that program is where all the county schools can get together, all the schools in the county, all from Parchman on back.

We only have like four schools—four districts—three districts, but we're trying to get everybody together so, you know, that Ruleville one thing—Drew is down beneath them, and Ruleville—you know—and I think our mayor and our board of aldermen need to do what you say we need to do. We need to get these people together. We need to come in. We need to talk about race relations in Ruleville, you know. Our board is mixed. We have a black mayor. We have black and white aldermen, and I have no problem with, you know, the way the board is set up because if you're in there and I see you're going to do a good job, I'll vote you, I'll support you. I'm not going to support you just because you're black, but if I see you can do the job, I'll support you, because I don't have that prejudice and discrimination in my heart.

Being a Christian you can't say that you have that. It's here in Ruleville, don't get me wrong, but I think it needs to start with the mayor and board of aldermen. They need to look at this thing and say, We've got a problem here, and we need to come together. We need a meeting of this—we need to bring it to a meeting, you know, and we need to sit down and talk about it. And that's where I feel we need to start. I'm hopeful.

**Ms. Shipp.** Okay, first of all, the board is the one that's got the last say-so, not the mayor, because I go to the board meetings. It's the five board members that should present whatever needs to be done. They know what needs to be done sometimes, and sometimes they don't. But to answer your question, ma'am, if you were in a three-bedroom house, and driving a nice car, you ain't worried about nobody else, because you know, what you going to worry about somebody else for when you're doing okay? It's a lot of peo-

ple doing okay. They ain't worried about the ones that's up under there. They're worried about them, and back to that. The board, the five board members, is the ones that need to get together, because see, the mayor ain't got no say-so. They're the ones who vote, and she only breaks the tie if one of the board members are not there. See, it's the board that needs to determine what Ruleville needs and what they don't need.

**Commissioner Berry.** Las year another—

**Ms. Shipp.** You know, that's how that goes.

**Commissioner Berry.** Last year another thing that we were told here, and in other rural towns where we visited on the church fires, was that blacks may have political—hold political offices, office—that is, get elected, hold political office, so on—but that in the Delta and in other areas, little towns through the South, blacks do not have power, don't have economic power, and really don't have political power. They hold office, be elected, so on, but that they do not hold the power. Do you think that's true or do you think that is just—was that last year or—

**Ms. Shipp.** Repeat the question again. I don't—

**Commissioner Berry.** Blacks maybe hold political office—that is, get elected to the mayor's office or something—but in terms of the power to change the conditions of life of the black people who live in the community, economically, in terms of jobs or business opportunities, or what they get, but they don't really have the power to change that that much. Is that—

**Ms. Shipp.** They're just holding the positions how.

**Rev. Brown.** They have positions, but they don't have power.

**Commissioner Berry.** They hold positions?

**Rev. Brown.** They hold positions, but they don't have power. You see, when you look at politics in general, it is the economic structure that controls politics, and not position, because—and when you look at the board of aldermen, it's those persons who are, as Sister Shipp said, those persons who are on that board of aldermen, if they are willing to do it, they have the three-bedroom house and the nice automobiles in their driveway, that they are not really concerned. See, what basically what we have here is—and you can look at this meeting and tell—that you have really a lack of interest in this. Now, there are some people

who are concerned. Those of us who are members of my church and other churches, who are here, and those of you who traveled from far away to come to be with us, but yet in the community in general we say we want jobs, we say we need jobs, we need money, but in our hearts we are not really exemplifying this, and because—I mean, just as I say, I go to meetings. I go to meetings at the other churches. They're not really demonstrating an interest in this, and the people that you get enough people are rounded together, the people—if enough people are rounded together, they could move whatever opposition that is in their way.

I mean, we've shown that, seen that in the civil rights movement. Even with guns, when enough people have banded together, they were able to bulldoze the government positions that was standing in front of them. So the thing is that people do not have enough—they are not—the interest is not there. Those of us who are up, who care for the ones who are under us, but the ones who do not have, they should be here voicing their opinion, and Ruleville is not really a small town. There are a number of people who knew about this meeting, could have been here, could have voted their opinion. I mean, so you can call all the meetings you want. I mean, even your board meeting—at the—you can look at the number of people who come. I mean, so if the interest is not here, the interest is not here, and really when you talk about finances, whether you're financing any jobs, we need jobs. True enough. But money does not change folks. See, people, if they have evil in their hearts, they're going to do evil when they get off work. So the thing is—the thing is that we need jobs, true enough, but the interest is not strong enough to revolutionize this community, and provoke that kind of change.

**Dr. Ward.** I don't want to mishear you, but please, I want something clarified. You said the interest is not strong enough and are you distributing that lack of interest across the board?

**Rev. Brown.** You talking about from a general vantage point?

**Dr. Ward.** Yes.

**Rev. Brown.** The interest is not there. I mean, you may take 15 percent and that's—and that may be as high as I would go, 15 percent of the people in this community and even in the community where I come from over in Bolivar

County, who may just have an intensified interest and say, look, who speaks like Mr. Donahoe and Sister Shipp and Sister Buckner and say we really need jobs and we really would like to come together and collaborate on these issues and discuss them, and then go out and try to rectify some kind of change, but the other 85 percent are going to sit back and they're going to watch. They may rally at first, but then when the pressure comes, they're going to beg back, and it's difficult to get people even to come to church, let alone come to meetings like this to air how they really feel, what they would really like to have for themselves and for their families. So—

**Commissioner Berry.** Is part of it an unwillingness to air how they feel? I mean, an unwillingness to come and stand up in public and talk about the issues?

**Rev. Brown.** The first step must be to get some kind of format to really force what's really inside of them. You need to get whatever is inside of them out and put it down on paper so that we can set goals and then—then we go out as a unit, as a group, as you said, both black and white, to achieve those goals. But getting people together to discuss them is one thing, and then it becomes increasingly more difficult to get people together to do something about their condition.

**Commissioner Berry.** Is it a lack of leadership?

**Rev. Brown.** Ma'am?

**Commissioner Berry.** Is it a lack of leadership?

**Rev. Brown.** Partly. I can put some of the blame on the leadership, because the majority of the pastors—I know from this side—I can speak for the pastors—the majority of the pastors—we've got some churches within this community, live out of town, and—

**Commissioner Berry.** I see.

**Rev. Brown.** I mean, they live out of town. I myself, I am over here approximately 5 to 6 days out of the week, and I live 20 miles away, but the other pastors, they live out of town and I mean, 20, 30 miles, and most of their congregations may just see them maybe once a week or maybe twice a month, I mean, for that matter.

And therefore, because of the pastor's lack of interest, the congregation—I mean their interest level is going to be low because the pastor's interest level is low with this kind of thing, because when you look in this room, how many

pastors are here today that knew about the meeting? One.

**Commissioner Berry.** So that explains some of it, then, doesn't it, perhaps leadership from the religious would be lacking if people aren't here; then you have the political leadership. There's a question about that. What about leadership from the business community? We're talking about on the black side. On the white side, what about leadership from the church community or ministers? You said that they aren't interested really, if I hear you correctly.

**Ms. Sarden.** I think they are unaware. I think a lot of—we didn't have any notice. They are unaware of the meeting.

**Commissioner Berry.** I meant interested in trying to—whether they come to this meeting or not, but I mean interested in trying to pull people together to talk about some of these issues.

**Ms. Sarden.** No interest—there's no interest in this.

**Commissioner Berry.** Well, how do we get them to be interested? What has to happen?

**Ms. Shipp.** There are a lot of people who do care, but they're scared—there's a problem with us, with the blacks—a lot of people won't come out and talk and hear people, what they need and how they think. But they're scared because that's what we been taught all our life, to be scared, but I'm not one of them. I'm going to speak my piece, ma'am, and I don't care whose toes I step on. You know, they're just scared.

**Dr. Ward.** How is it that they suddenly got so scared when one of the bravest women in Mississippi came out of this community?

**Ms. Shipp.** Fannie Lou Hamer—back to this. Okay. That's what I'm telling them, a few months ago there was time for voting. If this black lady got out and got feet and legs broken, some of them got killed, for us to have our rights to vote, why should we not come out here and vote for these people? These people died for it, got their legs broke. Fannie Lou Hamer was one of them. Look at Dr. Martin Luther King. Look what happened to him. They don't want it. Some of them just don't want it and some of them's scared.

**Commissioner Berry.** What do you think Fannie Lou Hamer would do if a church got burned and people were sitting there shooting and carrying on?

**Ms. Shipp.** I know when that vote went on in May and June, I know she would have turned over, several times. And the way that voting went, I know that body turned over. She turned over and she didn't turn over more than once, I turned over for her. I'm serious, ma'am. It's pitiful over—

**Commissioner Berry.** What did you say, Mr. Donahoe?

**Mr. Donahoe.** I said Fannie Hamer's daughter is one of the city clerks with us.

**Commissioner Berry.** See.

**Ms. Shipp.** Okay, that's—infamous daughter—yet she is—she works at city hall, but when it was time for the board meeting, give that lady her maternity leave, you know what they wanted to give her? Two weeks. A dog needs more than 2 weeks to give—I mean, what kind of—what's that, 2 weeks for this lady, she's having twins.

**Mr. Donahoe.** I don't know.

**Ms. Shipp.** Mr. Donahoe, they—E.D. Williams was saying that give that lady 2 weeks and Shirley Neal was too, and I was there. I go to all—when Ms. Nash got through speaking, there was one other board member, they gave her 6 weeks and her vacation time, but somebody had to speak up. You know, it's not right. You got to treat everybody—so when I cut myself and Mr. Donahoe cut himself, our blood is red. It ain't black and green and white, and when the Lord come and get you, he's going to be black, he's going to be black and white. All those men going up there with Reverend Brown, going down there—and whatever you do, ma'am, it's coming back on you. Whoever you treat wrong, you're going to pay. You're going to pay. And I know that, I had to learn it. It's right here in this Bible and the—I know you're going to pay. But they've got to learn and they better get in this Bible. We better teach it to them—break it on down. Break it down, break it all down. He said break the it down so you can understand it.

But Mr. Donahoe don't have—I've just got to give him this, and I'm going to say it again—he has done his job, I ain't going to lie—because 10 years ago I know that man helped me get that job. Then when I got pregnant with my daughter, I had an attitude. I ain't going to lie, but when you've overworked and underpaid, you're going to have an attitude. He stopped them people from messing with me. So we do—

**Mr. Donahoe.** I don't get full credit—

**Ms. Shipp.** But he does his part and I ain't going to lie on Mr. Donahoe. He knows—I speak for me. I know what he done for me. I can't speak for nobody else.

**Commissioner Berry.** Mr. Donahoe is the only white man in Sunflower County at the meeting.

**Ms. Shipp.** And when you look up in church, that—yes, he's put money on that table and not no little money. When it's time—

**Commissioner Berry.** I assume he's your private representative, right?

**Ms. Shipp.** I'm just going to talk about him—and when people's passed away, like my husband, he was there for me a number of times. When my mother-in-law died, he was right there, right there at my door, knocking on my door, coming on up in there, giving me what he wanted me to have. He's good—good with the people. Maybe we get some more like him, then Ruleville will be better. But you got to go in the bank—I got money here in the bank of Ruleville. We're not going in. Ain't no blacks in there. But all my money is there. And when the voting was going on, and I spoke up and—huh—she put me in the paper right here. Like I told them, I'm honored to vote—I'm honored to do whatever I believe in, I'll die and go to hell for. If I believe it is right, I'll die and go to heaven. When you walk up to the bank. I'm walking in there with my check, everybody looks around, everybody looking at you, but no blacks working in there. Don't you think that's—how do you think that feels? All the black people spend their money right here in Ruleville. You know where the whites take their money, Cleveland and Greenville, but there ain't no blacks in these stores and in these banks. It's pitiful. It's pitiful.

**Commissioner Berry.** Why is that? Why is that?

**Ms. Shipp.** Because you're the wrong color and the same color—I'm the same color as you, ma'am.

**Commissioner Berry.** Would anybody else know—do these people agree with that, disagree with that, or what is the situation?

**Mr. Jenkins.** There is a tremendous racial issue. I mean—

**Commissioner Berry.** Why is it? Yes—

**Ms. Shipp.** You go in there to get a loan, you ain't going to get no loan if you don't know nobody like Mr. Donahoe. And I ain't lying about it.

**Commissioner Berry.** Is it being qualified—

**Ms. Shipp.** He might not have no money in the bank, but he's well known, and if you don't know nobody, you don't get nothing, but see the Lord has blessed me, and I thank him for it. When my husband died, I got blessed. So I ain't got to go all—River Road, all over the Bank of Ruleville, all over—make all—but it's the idea how they look.

**Dr. Ward.** You wanted to make a comment, please. And identify yourself for the record. The lady in front of you wanted to make a comment.

**Ms. Barnes.** My name is Mamie Barnes. Like Ms. Shipp I am a member of the church that burned on Dockery, Highway 8, and I'd just like to say like you said, the gentleman said in the middle, we need to take a stand, you know, just like you said, Fannie Lou Hamer, where she marched for what she thought was right. What was right—what she marched for was right. And she died in the process of it, you know, through beatings and what have you. She died because of those severe injuries to her, so like you said, we should—each individual should take a stand, you know, because you know, anybody's job—it's everybody's job. But see, anybody thinks you could do it, but whose job is it? And just like Pastor Brown just said, okay, my parish is Rev. John H. Wheaton. I don't know, did he know about the meeting? You know, and then some know about the meeting and they don't care. We are a small membership church, just like Pastor Brown's church. All our members should be here, if they knew about it. You know, on the phone we called certain ones to come to the meeting. The ones that think they're the leaders of the church, you know, you want to have someone just pay less and want to do everything. So all of us should be here, but whose job is it? We need to take a stand, get together. You know, everyone needs to get together. We just need to come together.

Just like Ms. Shipp just said, that we're so comfortable to what we have and some—I don't care. I'm not interested in it. But now, the members are singing this—just to be honest, some of our members are saying that, and they're saying it in church. They said everything; they're not saying nothing. Representation in everything. If

you represent something, if you don't stand for something, you're going to fall for anything, if you don't stand for something. So we need to take a stand, each individual. You know, that's passing the buck, you know, they're just passing the buck and we're putting it on—we're saying okay.

It ain't just started. But like I said, we need all to take a stand. If this gentleman—if we had more like Donahoe, it would be okay.

See, I'm talking what I know. But whose job is it to do? It's everyone's job, but see anybody thinks one person can do it. Well, she's going, she might not show up. Or he's going, he might not show up. But it's all of our jobs, you know. Like I said, you all not going to follow your hands—you got to take a stand on what you want, because they're not going to do anything. You don't sit back. Well, just go ahead and do what you have to do, you know, improve your life, just go ahead, you know.

**Mr. Jenkins.** You talked in terms of the bank not hiring minorities. You talked in terms of some of the stores in town not hiring blacks. Has anybody applied for those jobs or what has happened to those persons?

**Ms. Shipp.** Sir, people apply every day, and—I know for a fact, but they did hire a black woman there.

**Mr. Jenkins.** You're talking at the bank?

**Ms. Shipp.** At the bank—I remember one lady worked at the bank and she worked there for years—what's the lady's name—Alexander lady—she worked there probably years, but she moved and went to Cleveland, so she worked in Cleveland.

**Mr. Jenkins.** If the community has recognized, the black community has recognized that you have a problem not getting blacks employed with the bank and at some of the stores in town, then what do you think the black community must do now?

**Ms. Shipp.** See, what we got to do is get together start making these boycott—but we're not going to get together because some of us is scared; some of them aren't going to speak up, I don't care what you do to them. But if we get together and boycott and let these stores and banks know that there's some blacks are qualified and that they should be in there, which they already know that—maybe something will change then.

**Ms. Johnson.** Then all the blacks—

**Ms. Shipp.** They think we're all stupid. They think we can't read and write. But we show them and we show them, we showed them on election day that we could stick together, then we—

**Commissioner Berry.** Were you going to say something, my brother?

**Mr. Johnson.** If black persons do work in the bank, they're going to work in the back. Ain't no black—come in through the back and leave out the back. That's the only way—unless you're working down—even when they don't work—they always work at the back.

**Dr. Ward.** You may have to find out a little bit about how people work in the front of the bank. And now, the enlightened bank in Jackson—and I say it's enlightened—Deposit Guaranty, has young black people working in all departments back and front. Maybe you can talk to some of those people and find out how they got to be tellers and assistant vice presidents.

**Commissioner Berry.** Figure out how they got there.

**Mr. Johnson.** They have better degrees than some of the people working in the bank, but why they still working in the—why they can't work in the front with the money.

**Ms. Shipp.** They don't trust us—they think your hand is sticky.

**Dr. Ward.** I can't answer—all I'm saying is let's inform ourselves, you know, you say that they won't—what I hear, I would translate that into, they're going to be in the back because they're doing menial jobs or they're doing some kind of work, you know, but they're not going to be there handling money, probably for the reasons you—and some others, reasons you say. But that can be changed.

You must always realize that situations are not fixed, nowhere, and I go back—I'm old enough now to have lived through what changed Mississippi in part, to say that if people in Ruleville in 1967 had been scared, this place would be really unlivable.

**Ms. Shipp.** What did you say now?

**Dr. Ward.** If people in Ruleville had been afraid in 1967, this community would be unlivable today. It is human to be afraid. I would be a first class liar to tell you not to have fear. It is human to be afraid. People went through the entire civil rights movement afraid, paralyzed with fear, but the paralyzes kept them moving.

You understand what I'm telling you? So I don't have any magic formulas. Those of you who were born here, who have lived here all of your lives, who are residents of Ruleville, have to become the instruments for change, and maybe in the ways you say, maybe in other ways, but it has to be done here. You cannot sit or slip into the 21st century with the same problems you have so that when we come back in the 21st century, you'll be telling us the bridge is still there, the bridge—the graffiti is still on the bridge and they're still shooting the snakes, and somebody else new got a church out there and they can't have service because they're being disturbed. I don't want to hear that in 2001. I don't want to hear that in 2001.

**Commissioner Berry.** And there's nobody working in the bank.

**Dr. Ward.** Right.

**Commissioner Berry.** Or in the stores.

**Rev. Brown.** There's still a lack of interest. If you can take young men, who will go out onto a football field and risk having their legs and their arms and their necks being broken for a piece of pigskin, and people are too afraid to get out and to rally for their own rights and for monies that they could earn to take care of their families and themselves. I mean, and you see people risking their lives everyday, people get shot in clubs, stabbed in clubs, but that doesn't stop them from going. What I'm saying is, is that people are interested in what they want to be interested in, and in this kind of thing, the interest is not hot enough, the intensity is not hot enough. I mean where they're ready to go all out and to get what they really want, they risk their lives for what they want to risk their lives for. And I mean, people do it all the time. There is a race problem, very racial, and what you have seen with our church and with other churches, is really indicative of the fact that there is a racial climate in this area, as well as for the entire State. You can't get over and beyond it. I mean, it is an issue. It is an issue. It may have buried some, but when you say buried, sometimes things—dust can be there, but you can just have a rug over it.

I mean, just because you see black and white working together doesn't mean that they love each other. I mean, they could be there just like the Jews were with the Samaritan. They could be there just for the financial portion of it, and



then when you get outside the economic boundaries, then they basically have to associate with one another.

**Dr. Ward.** Let me ask a question about something in Ruleville that hasn't been mentioned. And it's one of my pet topics. What's being taught in the schools in Ruleville? Now, I want to be clear—I want you to understand me. I don't mean what courses. I assume that the curriculum as set by the State Department of Education and/or local school boards is what's being taught. But tell me, what is being taught in the schools in Ruleville? What are your children learning in the schools in Ruleville?

**Mr. Johnson.** Personally—I'm from Ruleville Senior High School. I didn't learn nothing. So time—come time to take a test, nobody knows. So everybody failed this test. I think that's one of the reasons why Ruleville High School is on probation now, because of that test.

**Dr. Ward.** This test you are talking about is the Mississippi proficiency?

**Mr. Johnson.** I don't know. But I see—if we had a teacher that taught us where you could have passed that test.

**Commissioner Berry.** Now, you were taught nothing. You were basically taught nothing? Is that basically what you're saying?

**Mr. Johnson.** Yes, ma'am. I learned a little bit but now what I wanted to learn.

**Commissioner Berry.** Or what you needed to learn to pass the test?

**Mr. Johnson.** What I needed to learn about the American history, I didn't learn it. I learned a few things.

**Dr. Ward.** Well, I raise the question because you know Dr. Berry asked me, Where is the leadership coming from? And I've always assumed, rightly or wrongly, that leadership comes from younger generations of people, and obviously, as we all had to do, young people today have to learn basics and something we didn't have to learn, that's computers, how to be computer literate, that kind of computer technology. But it's something that we all have to learn if we are going to be effective in our adult lives, and in our schooling. Where is responsibility for—spiritual matters is taught in your churches—but where is the responsibility for social matters coming from if it doesn't come through the schools, where is it going to come from?

If he wants to learn American history, somebody in the school needs to learn history not as a narrative but as something that people in Ruleville helped to make. When we write books about civil rights, we write about Ruleville. We write about people who lived here, and who did or did not do things. Can any high school graduate in the Ruleville school run this city?

**Ms. Shipp.** Pardon me?

**Dr. Ward.** Can anyone who graduates from a high school in Ruleville run this city?

**Ms. Shipp.** Who—

**Dr. Ward.** Do they know enough about what goes on in the municipality?

**Commissioner Berry.** Do they teach them about the process?

**Dr. Ward.** Then you can make the case that you went through the school system and learned something, but I'm asking you is that going on now?

**Commissioner Berry.** Do they actually teach, if I may tag on, do they teach about Ruleville and what happened here?

**Ms. Shipp.** Ruleville—

**Commissioner Berry.** Do you know what the history is and your place in it and what happened here in this community and in this area?

**Ms. Shipp.** No—

**Commissioner Berry.** And how it all happened and what happened and who did it and what came about and so on? Do they teach that?

**Mr. Johnson.** I say the only chance that a high school student would learn about Ruleville in the ninth grade, when they take Mississippi history. That's the only time a student really learn about what happened in Ruleville. They would teach a little about it.

**Commissioner Berry.** But do they actually teach for those of you who went to school here, about—

**Ms. Shipp.** They don't—

**Commissioner Berry.** —Ruleville and the civil rights movement?

**Ms. Shipp.** We—10 years ago, we learned, because of all the stuff that's going on—going on 16 years ago—and now they have—teaching—American teachers—my daughter has an American teacher. Those teachers don't care. They don't want to know no way—they ain't got time—if this—in my daughter's room, Keith Small, and he went to Head Start, because they told us we made too much money. Then after my

husband died, they still told me she couldn't go, and there wasn't any income coming in the house then, so it's nice—going to Head Start. You got to get that Head Start. If you don't, you're going to be late like my daughter is now, and that's what I think is affecting her now, because they wouldn't let her go to Head Start. See, you got to get some basics like ABC, 123. I had to buy Hooked on Phonics for my daughter. You got to have the basics, and if you don't go to the Head Start, you're not going to get the basics, and then if you're slower than this child, then that means you fall behind, and they keep on going with this child, because he's smart. They don't worry about the ones that can't catch on. See, everybody can't catch on like me or Reginald or—and everybody is not smart.

**Commissioner Berry.** That lady over there wants to say something.

**Ms. Barnes.** You know, nowadays you went to the school—they don't have time to—you know, because you can walk into a classroom, walk in the child's classroom, and you can see two or three teachers that have—how can you teach my child—something happened in the streets. You can't do that, so I have—and I have a 13-year-old son. You cannot teach my child if you're not being taught yourself. You've got to get in order to give to the kids in school. They're out there with the teacher—the kids can't teach on their own. You have to teach those kids, so now that's why a lot of students don't know nothing now. And you're going to punish—skipping, sick days—when we was going to school 16 years ago, we didn't know nothing about none of that.

You know, it seemed like every other week these kids are out of school. My son would come home and say, Mama, we don't have to go to school—we got a sick day—what is that for? Well, you ain't learning nothing out there. You know, that's what I don't understand. But if they would have the teachers that we had when we was going to school, the school system would be a better school than what it is today. See, this is where we—they took this out of the schools. They took prayer out of schools. But you need prayer. You've got to get—pray to that man—because he's the head of all our lives, but they took this out of schools and it should be back in schools.

**Commissioner Berry.** You're a student, right?

**Mr. Johnson.** Yes, ma'am. This is my first—to me at Ruleville Central there was a whole lot of animosity among the teachers, because too many teachers at that school wanted to have too much power. Like the Doctor said, she is teaching now—she's higher than everybody since she has more degrees than everybody. She wants more things than other teachers, you know. I don't like being in that kind of environment in the schools that many teachers have animosity against other teachers. They don't like other teachers. Should act to help us, you know, graduate.

**Commissioner Berry.** But in the ninth grade they teach Mississippi history?

**Mr. Johnson.** That one time.

**Commissioner Berry.** And they—when you were in the ninth grade, and you took Mississippi history, what did you learn about the civil rights movement in Ruleville?

**Mr. Johnson.** When I was in the ninth grade I was in Indianola.

**Commissioner Berry.** You didn't learn anything—

**Mr. Johnson.** I wasn't there when I was in the ninth grade.

**Commissioner Berry.** Where were you?

**Mr. Johnson.** Indianola.

**Commissioner Berry.** So you weren't in the—

**Mr. Johnson.** No, ma'am.

**Commissioner Berry.** Did they teach you about the civil rights movement at Indianola?

**Mr. Johnson.** Yes, ma'am, around Mississippi.

**Commissioner Berry.** They told you about Fannie Lou Hamer and they told you about Unita Blackwell and they told you about all these people? Do you know who Unita Blackwell is?

**Mr. Johnson.** No.

**Commissioner Berry.** Do you know who Unita Blackwell is?

**Mr. Johnson.** No, ma'am.

**Mr. Jenkins.** Do you know who Fannie Lou Hamer was?

**Mr. Johnson.** Yes, ma'am, I knew who she was.

**Commissioner Berry.** Who was she?

**Mr. Johnson.** She worked to get people to vote.

**Commissioner Berry.** So they taught that—

**Mr. Johnson.** They taught—

**Commissioner Berry.** And how much did you get of that? How long—the part on the civil rights movement?

**Mr. Johnson.** Well, I learned more about that—that class last a semester.

**Commissioner Berry.** You had a whole semester on the civil rights movement?

**Mr. Johnson.** Just one semester about—no, ma'am. Just a semester about Mississippi history.

**Commissioner Berry.** Oh, Mississippi?

**Mr. Johnson.** Yes.

**Commissioner Berry.** Okay, all right.

**Dr. Ward.** I can't get—

**Mr. Johnson.** They have—like in February, like this—they had a black history program for a week. That's the only time—

**Dr. Ward.** If there are other people who have statements to make, please do, because we're pretty close to the time that we promised we would end, so if anyone who has not spoken or someone who has spoken would like to make some closing remarks or bring up a topic, I'd be very willing to hear that. Yes, Mel.

**Mr. Jenkins.** Couple statements I want to make to the general audience. As the Regional Director for the Commission in this area, one of the things that I am often interested in is coming back to work with the local leadership and talking in terms of bringing persons together to sit down and talk about race relations in Ruleville. We talked in terms of that today with the Governor, for a human relations commission. One of the things that I often think about when I think about the civil rights movement back in the 1960s and 1970s is that we had local human rights commissions and agencies bringing folk together to begin to develop a common goal. Where do we want to take this community in the next 2 or 3 years in terms of race relations?

When I was here last year I think I talked to Mr. Donahoe about a human relations commission and bringing persons together to sit down and begin to develop a program for all persons. When you talk in terms of blacks not working in the local department stores and in the bank,

what needs to be done? The persons and the leadership, not only from the political side, but from the ministers and community leaders, need to come together to begin to develop a dialogue on where do we want to be in the next couple of years. I wanted to come back to try to meet with the local leaders, the ministers, and begin that dialogue on racial issues in the Ruleville area, along with the State Advisory Committee—maybe working through the State Advisory Committee and Dr. Ward and the 10 members of his Committee in trying to develop this dialogue.

**Commissioner Berry.** Well, I just want to say that we had hoped after last year—I had hoped at least after last year, with the church burnings and the aftermath, that it would at least have stimulated some kind of dialogue across racial lines, that the community would, black and white, decide that it was time to either—even if they had a human relations commission, that could exercise some leadership or put some kind of structure in place, and start having these discussions about schools and jobs and businesses and changing the racial climate and having community solidarity.

And I'm disappointed that that does not seem to have happened, and I, like Dr. Ward, would not like to come back here in the 21st century and have people telling me about the same problems that I heard about without any kind of response. Somebody has got to take leadership in this community, and I'm hoping now that the Advisory Committee with Melvin Jenkins and working with the political leadership here can in fact—and the churches, that maybe they can be a catalyst to try to get something going here to try to address some of these issues. And I want to thank the Chair of the State Advisory Committee, Dr. Ward, for—and Melvin Jenkins for organizing this and I've learned a great deal.

**Mr. Jenkins.** Thank you.

**Commissioner Berry.** Thank you very much for coming over.

[The proceedings concluded at 8:15 p.m.]

Appendix A



UNITED STATES  
COMMISSION ON  
CIVIL RIGHTS

Central Regional Office  
Gateway Tower II  
400 State Avenue, Suite 908  
Kansas City, KS 66101-2406  
(913) 551-1400  
(913) 551-1413 FAX

June 29, 1998

Mr. Ned Holder, Sheriff  
Sunflower County  
1300 Allen Road  
Indianola, MS 38751

Dear Sheriff Holder:

Pursuant to the rules and regulations governing State Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "if a report of a State Advisory Committee tends to defame, degrade or incriminate any person, then the report shall be delivered to such person thirty days before the report shall be made public in order that such person may make a timely answer to the report." Each person so defamed, degraded or incriminated in a report may file an answer to the report not later than twenty days after receiving said report. Please review the enclosed pages of the Mississippi Advisory Committee's transcript of a community forum held on June 27, 1997 in Ruleville, Mississippi at the Ruleville Community House.

We ask that you provide your timely response. However upon showing good cause an extension may be granted to you. Your response shall plainly and concisely state the facts and law constituting your reply to the allegations contained in the report. Your answer shall be published as an appendix to the report.

Thank you for your cooperation in this undertaking. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

  
MELVIN L. JENKINS, Esq.  
Director

Enclosure

SUNFLOWER COUNTY SHERIFF DEPARTMENT  
1300 ALLEN ROAD INDIANOLA MS 38751  
601-887-2121

MR. MELVIN L JENKINS, ESQ  
CENTRAL REGIONAL OFFICE  
GATEWAY TOWER 11  
400 STATE AVENUE, SUITE 908  
KANSAS CITY, KS 66101-2406



DEAR MELVIN JENKINS,

IN REFERENCE NEW MOUNT ZION CHURCH LOCATED IN RULEVILLE MS  
SUNFLOWER COUNTY, THIS CASE HAS BEEN SOLVED AND WE ARE HOPING TO  
MAKE THE ARREST IN THE LATER PART OF JULY, WE HAVE BEEN WORKING ON  
THIS CASE FOR A LITTLE OVER TWO YEARS, JUST AS SOON AS THE FEDERAL  
GRAND JURY INDICTS WE WILL MAKE THE ARREST ARE SUBJECTS ARE TWO  
WHITE MALES AND ONE WHITE FEMALE, THIS IS ALL THE INFORMATION I CAN  
GIVE AT THIS POINT. THIS HAS BEEN A LONG HARD INVESTIGATION AND IT IS  
ALMOST TO A END. WE HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH THE FBI ON THIS CASE. I  
HAVE BEEN WORKING FOR THE SHERIFF FOR AROUND TWO YEARS AND WITH  
THE CENRAL DELTA DRUG TASK FORCE WHILE INVESTIGATING THIS CASE WITH  
THE FBI, SINCE MY EMPLOYMENT FOR THE SUNFLOWER COUNTY SHERIFF WE  
HAVE BEEN OVER WORKED BECAUSE WE DON'T HAVE BUT FOUR DEPUTIES  
PLUS THE CHIEF DEPUTY. WHEN WE HAVE THREE COURTS GOING ON IT TIES UP  
THREE OF MY DEPUTIES AND WE ALSO HAVE TO MAKE TRIPS EVERDAY TO  
JACKSON AND TO BOTH TRAINING SCHOOLS AND WE ALSO HAVE TO SERVE  
PAPERS NEARLY EVERYDAY. WERE NOT TRYING MAKE EXCUSES THIS IS THE  
TRUTH, MYSELF AND THE SHERIFF IS LOOKING FOWARD TO HELP YOU AND  
MEET YOU WHEN YOU GET TO SUNFLOWER COUNTY, JUST GIVE US A CALL.

THANKS, CHIEF DEPUTY ROBERT THOMPSON

Appendix B



UNITED STATES  
COMMISSION ON  
CIVIL RIGHTS

Central Regional Office  
Gateway Tower II  
400 State Avenue, Suite 908  
Kansas City, KS 66101-2406  
(913) 551-1400  
(913) 551-1413 FAX

June 29, 1998

Mr. George Purcell, President  
Bank of Ruleville  
P.O. Box 99  
Ruleville, MS 38771

Dear Mr. Purcell:

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Thank you for your cooperation in this undertaking. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melvin L. Jenkins", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

MELVIN L. JENKINS, Esq.  
Director

Enclosure

**No response was received from the Bank of Ruleville.**

U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS  
Central Regional Office  
Gateway Tower II  
400 State Ave., Suite 908  
Kansas City, KS 66101-2406

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