

A F F I D A V I T

STATE OF ALABAMA     )  
                              )  
COUNTY OF DALLAS    )

My name is James E. Gildersleve and I am a Negro. I live at 1726 Green Street in Selma with my wife and two daughters. I am 45 years old. I teach social studies to grades 7 through 12 at Alabama Lutheran Academy and College in Selma. I was born in Marengo County, Alabama, and have lived in Selma for about 10 years. I graduated from Miles College in Birmingham with a B.S. degree in 1951 and in 1958 I received a Master's degree in education from Alabama State College in Montgomery. I served in the United States Army from October, 1941 to October, 1945 and was in combat at Salerno, Italy, in 1943. I am on the mission board of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, Southern District.

In the Fall of 1962, I was elected vice-president of the Dallas County Voters League. The Voters League is an organization of Negroes living in Dallas County and its main objective is to encourage and assist Negroes to become registered voters. The Voters League has been in existence for many years, even before I moved to Dallas County. About the time I became vice-president of the Voters League last year, the Voters League membership was trying to build up interest in voter registration among Dallas County Negroes. We were very concerned because it seemed that the number of Negroes registered to vote in Dallas County was decreasing. Our records disclosed that although we once had 163 Negroes registered, there were now only 156.

Even before being elected vice-president of the Voters League, I had been trying to help Negroes to get registered in Dallas County. I had been asked to be an instructor of a voting clinic and to help organize it. The idea was that we would explain the voting application form to interested Negroes, teach them how to fill out the form correctly and encourage them to go to the

Courthouse to apply. The attempt by the Voters League to set up these clinics was a failure. I recall we actually had only one clinic. One of the problems was that we had no one who could devote time every day to organizing the clinics.

In February, 1963, Rev. Bernard Lafayette, of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee of Atlanta came to Dallas County at the request of the Voters League to help the Voters League in its effort to get Negroes registered to vote. The Voters League had a meeting in February, 1963, and I recall that I made a motion to have Rev. Lafayette work on organizing voting clinics similar to the ones we tried to organize in 1962. Since Rev. Lafayette has been in Dallas County, the Voters League has made tremendous progress. Our efforts had practically come to a standstill before Rev. Lafayette arrived. Since he started to work with us, we have had a lot of interest among Dallas County Negroes in getting registered to vote. A lot of people have come to our clinics that are held every Tuesday and Thursday nights and have been held regularly ever since Rev. Lafayette arrived. I go to these clinics myself and act as an instructor. At these clinics, I, Rev. Lafayette and the other instructors discuss and explain the voter application forms, go over the questions on the forms, tell the people how they may be treated, make arrangements to provide transportation to and from the Courthouse if it is needed and ask voter applicants to notify us when they apply and whether or not they are accepted as voters.

Since Rev. Lafayette came to work with the Voters League, there has been a lot of interest in the Voters League work among young people in Dallas County. These young people have passed out leaflets advertising our mass meetings and other material urging Negroes to become registered voters and have been asked to help their parents become registered.

On May 14, 1963, the Voters League sponsored a mass meeting at the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Selma. This Church is in a Negro neighborhood.

The purpose of the meeting was to create interest in voting registration and to encourage Negroes to go to the Dallas County Courthouse to apply to become a voter. The Voters League also wanted to provide an opportunity to raise money for Rev. L. L. Anderson of Selma, who is scheduled for trial because of a traffic death. I helped arrange the program for the meeting at which James Forman of Atlanta, representing the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, was the main speaker. The program consisted of songs, prayers and speeches by Rev. C. C. Hunter, Rev. Lafayette, Mr. Forman and myself. All the speeches were concerned with encouraging Dallas County Negroes to become voters. When I arrived at the meeting about 7:30 p.m., I saw about 25-30 white men outside the church wearing guns and carrying clubs. Some of them were in uniform and some of them wore khaki clothes and were in what is called by me and other Negroes the sheriff's posse. When I went inside the church I saw three police officers there. They were wearing guns. One of them, from the Dallas County Sheriff's office, was wearing a walkie-talkie and he talked on it throughout the meeting. There were three or four photographers at the meeting. I recognized one of them as being from The Selma Times-Journal. These photographers roamed all over the church and the speaker's platform taking pictures of the people in the audience and on the platform. I have never seen any pictures of this meeting in the Selma, or any other, newspaper. I estimate that about 400 Negroes from Dallas County came to the meeting. There was no trouble during the meeting or after it was over.

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The Voters League held a second mass meeting on June 17, 1963, at the First Baptist Church in Selma. This meeting was also to encourage Negro voter registration. The church is in a Negro neighborhood. The guest speaker was Rev. James Bevel of Mississippi. The program was similar to that of the first mass meeting and the speeches by Rev. Bevel, Rev. Lafayette and a short speech I made urged Negroes to become registered voters. About 400-500 Negroes from Dallas County attended and it was a peaceful meeting with no disturbances. When

I arrived at the church about 7:30 p.m., I saw about four automobiles in front of and near the church. In these automobiles were white men, some of them wearing light helmets. I saw that some of these men were copying license plate numbers from cars containing Negroes that drove up to the church. During the meeting, there were three or four white men in the church. The same deputy sheriff, whom I believe is Lt. Suther, had a walkie-talkie and talked on it throughout the meeting. A photographer walked around the church taking pictures of the Negroes present. The meeting ended at about 10 p.m. WJ

On the morning of May 20, 1963, about 10 to 10:30, a Monday and the first registration day in Dallas County following the May 14 mass meeting, I drove two Negro ladies to the Courthouse so they could try to register to vote. They are Dr. Rosa J. Young, who is in her 30's, and Ola Dunning, whom I think is 75 years old. After I had parked my car, I and Rev. L. L. Anderson, who said he was there to try to get registered himself, helped the ladies up the Courthouse steps and into the building where they got in line in the hallway near the registrar's office. I waited there as they had asked me to take them home after completing their applications. A deputy sheriff, whom I believe is Lt. Suther, told me I would have to leave. He didn't say why and I didn't ask why. I left and went outside. After waiting outside for several minutes, I went back inside to ask Dr. Young and Mrs. Dunning how long they thought they would be before they were ready to leave. Mrs. Dunning told me that a photographer had been inside taking pictures and had asked her for my name. I went back outside and saw a photographer with a press camera. -I- WJ  
~~believe he works for The Dallas Times-Journal.~~ I asked him why he was taking pictures. He said he was taking pictures for the newspaper. I told him I hoped he knew what he was doing. About noon, Dr. Young and Mrs. Dunning came out and said that the registrar's office had closed for lunch and they hadn't been

able to apply as yet. I took Mrs. Dunning home and brought her back in the afternoon. I waited outside and I believe I drove both Dr. Young and Mrs. Dunning to their homes after they applied.

James E. Gildersleeve  
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Subscribed and sworn to before me this 24 day of June, 1963.

J. L. Lindsey, N. P.  
Notary Public