

A F F I D A V I T

STATE OF ALABAMA }
COUNTY OF DALLAS }

My name is Bernard Lafayette, Jr. I am 32 years old and a Negro. I was born in Tampa, Florida and I graduated from Middleton Senior High School in Tampa in 1959. I attended the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee, from October, 1959 to May, 1961. I transferred to Fisk University in Nashville and attended Fisk for one semester from February to June, 1962. I am a licensed minister by the New Hope Baptist Church in Tampa and Dover Heights Baptist Church in Nashville. I have never had a church ministry. I am married and have no children.

I interrupted my college education to work with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) of Atlanta. I am now, and have been since September, 1961, except for my semester at Fisk, a SNCC field secretary. SNCC is an organization of Negroes and some white persons. One of its main activities is to work in various states assisting Negroes to become registered voters. Often SNCC is asked by Negro leaders and organizations to come into their local communities and help them in their voting registration efforts.

In November, 1962, the Dallas County (Alabama) voters League requested assistance from the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta in getting Dallas County Negroes to become voters. One of the functions of the Southern Regional Council is to assist Negro voting registration and the Council contacted SNCC concerning the Dallas County request. I was then working on Negro voting registration in Mississippi for SNCC and SNCC asked me and I agreed to go to Dallas County to determine if such a project was desirable at that time. I thought, after seeing a few days in Selma, the county seat of Dallas County, that it was. In February, 1963, I was named by SNCC the director of the Central Alabama Voter Registration Project. The project was to help local Negro leaders and organization in getting Negroes registered as voters in Dallas, Wilcox and other Alabama counties.

I returned to Dallas County on February 10, 1963 to start work in helping the Dallas County Voters League in its effort of assisting Negroes to become voters. I have been working in Dallas County on this project continuously since February 10, 1963, except for a few days spent in other nearby Alabama counties working on voting registration. I am here at the invitation of the Voters League, an organization of Negroes living in Dallas County, and I work in cooperation with it. The purpose of the Voters League is to assist every eligible person in Dallas County who desires it to become a registered voter. The Voters League holds meetings once a month and I am a member. I make reports to the Voters League of my activities and make suggestions for future plans and action. The membership of the Voters League discusses my suggestions and those from other members and a consensus comes from the meetings which guides my activities. My function is to provide the organization needed to accomplish the Voters League goal. B.S.

In carrying out my work with the Voters League, I have recruited about 50 young people from Dallas County to help with the project. I also have had the help of a part time field worker for the last two weeks, a 16 year old Negro boy from Birmingham named Alexander Brown. These young people I have recruited pass out leaflets and other printed matter advertising voter's clinics and mass meetings, teach eligible people who want to apply for registration to vote how to properly fill out application forms and try to determine how many Negroes go to the Dallas County courthouse to make application for voting registration and how many of those who apply are accepted.

Our program has also included establishing voters' clinics. They are held every Tuesday and Thursday nights at Franklin Street in Selma or, at times at the Shiloh Baptist Church in Bogus Chitta, Alabama. The purpose of these clinics is to have Negroes who wish to register come and learn the procedure. I try to attend every clinic and so do the officers of the Voters League. We explain to the people who attend what the requirements are to become a voter. We show them sample application forms and we teach them the meaning of all the questions on the form and show them how the form should be filled out. We tell

them what to expect at the courthouse when they go there to apply and we ask them to let us know when they go to the courthouse and whether they were able to fill out an application form. We ask them to let us know if they were accepted or rejected.

The voter's clinics have been held each Tuesday and Thursday nights since January 29, 1963. I know that the records of the Voters League, which are kept by ^{a B.L. instructor} the Voters League secretary, Mrs. Marie Foster, show that 90 different persons have attended at least one clinic since January 29. Three people attended the two meetings held in January; in February, 53 persons attended; in March, 27 persons attended; in April, 35 persons attended; in May, 46 persons attended; and up to and including the clinic of June 20, 1963, 11 persons have attended in June, 1963.

The Voters League has also sponsored two mass meetings in order to encourage Negroes to try to become registered voters. These meetings were held on May 14 and June 17. We advertise the meetings well in advance by passing out leaflets, by calling at people's homes and by speaking at churches and other organizations.

The voters' clinics became much busier after the May 14 mass meeting was publicized and then held. Our records show that nine persons attended the voters' clinic of May 14; that 12 persons attended the clinic of May 21; that eight persons attended the clinic of May 23; that two persons attended the clinic of May 29; and that nine persons attended the clinic of May 30. We have not had more than three persons at a clinic during the month of June, 1963.

The first mass meeting was held on May 14 at the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Selma, which is in a Negro living section of Selma. The guest speaker was James Forman of Atlanta, executive-secretary of SNCC. I arrived at the church about 6:30 p.m., an hour before the meeting was to start. When I arrived there were about four police cars containing white men either parked near the church or driving around near the church. There were about 10 uniformed officers and other white men not in police uniforms standing across the street from the church. They wore or carried guns and clubs and some of them had helmets on th

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beams. There were no other white persons in the vicinity of the church and Negroes had not yet begun to arrive for the mass meeting. I went inside the church for a committee meeting and then came back outside about 7:30. At this time I saw many more cars and trucks, some carrying white men, around the church. I saw about 30 white men standing around in the uniform of the city police or the sheriff's office or dressed in khaki clothes with helmets. They all seemed to be armed with guns and clubs. I and other Negroes refer to the men in khaki clothes as the sheriff's posse. I believe they live in Dallas County and are deputized by the sheriff of the county. This night they were obviously a part of the law enforcement group at the church. B.H.

The mass meeting began with a prayer by Rev. O. E. Hunter of Selma. A hymn was sung and speeches were made about the need for Negroes to become registered voters by Rev. Hunter, Mr. Silversleeve, vice-president of the Voters League, myself and Mr. Bryan. A prayer was said for Mr. J. L. Boynton who died that day. Mr. Boynton had been president of the Voters League. A collection was taken for Mrs. L. M. Anderson who is facing a trial arising from a traffic accident and Rev. Anderson thanked everyone. Prayers were said and the meeting closed with a benediction. Rev. Hunter and I had urged the people to leave the meeting quietly and to go directly home. The meeting, at which I estimate 400-450 Negro persons attended, was conducted peacefully and there were no disturbances. Throughout the meeting two county sheriffs from the Dallas County sheriff's office and one person who I believe is a city policeman were inside the church. They were armed with pistols. One of the deputy sheriffs, named Guther, stood at the back door with a walkie-talkie which he used throughout the meeting. The other two took notes. There were about four photographers and a movie camera man inside the church taking pictures of the audience and the people on the speaker's platform.

The day following the meeting, May 15, a front news story appeared on the front page of the Selma Times-Journal. The story said that I was a speaker and that I urged a massive turnout of Negroes at the May 20th meeting of the Dallas County Board of Registrars. It stated that I had been in Selma for the

last 60 days to organize the mass meeting and that I had said at the meeting that there were enough Negroes in Dallas County to decide who its elected officials would be. A copy of this newspaper article is attached to this affidavit.

On June 11, 1963, I was going to my home on Union Street in Selma at about 11:00 p.m. A car was parked in the middle of the street directly in front of my house and a white man was seated behind the driver's wheel. Another white man, who was standing by this car, asked me to push their car as it wouldn't start. I attempted to push the car and the white man who was standing on the street asked me to get out of my car to make sure the bumpers set. I got out of my car and when I did, this man struck me several times on the head with a blunt object, ~~and kicked me~~. ^{B.L.} Then this man jumped into the car with the other white man and they drove away. I phoned the Selma police and they came to my house to talk to me. I then went to the Hurwell Infirmary where six stitches were put in my scalp. The police also talked to me at the hospital. I also reported this beating and gave a statement to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. To my knowledge, these white men have not been arrested.

On the morning of June 17, I asked a 19 year old Negro boy from Selma named Leslie Reese who has been helping the Voters League in its activities to go with Alexander Brown to the Dallas County Courthouse and see how many Negroes were attempting to register to vote. This was a regular voters registration day at the courthouse. I told Reese and Brown to find out the names and addresses of any Negroes who were there and apply so that the Voters League would have a record of that and then could also contact these people to see if they were accepted. We have had a lot of difficulty keeping track of the numbers of Negroes who apply to register and finding out who was accepted. The Voters League records show that 31 Negroes have applied to register to vote since January 29, 1963, but I know and the officers of the Voters League know that many more have applied. I had previously told Reese and Brown of the importance of taking pictures of Negroes who were attempting to register. The Voters League wants pictures of Negroes waiting to register so that these pictures can be shown to other Negroes in Dallas County and they can be told and shown

that it is possible to try to get registered. I heard that afternoon from Brown that Reese had been taken by Dallas County Sheriff Clark into the sheriff's office. I went to his office to see the sheriff to find out whether Reese had been arrested. I asked the sheriff about Reese and he told me Reese had been arrested for failure to obey an officer and for resisting arrest. The sheriff asked me my name and I told him what it is. This was the first time I had ever talked to Sheriff Clark. I left and went to the county jail, where Reese was being held, to see whether a bond had been set for Reese. While at the jail, I saw a paper that said Reese was charged with *action calculated to provoke* *B.L.* breach of the peace and resisting arrest.

That night, June 17, the Voters League sponsored its second mass meeting at the First Baptist Church in Dallas, which is in a Negro living area of the city. The meeting was scheduled to start at 7:00 p.m. and the guest speaker was Rev. James Bevel of Mississippi. This meeting had also been advertised in advance by the distribution of leaflets, by word of mouth and by speeches at churches and other organizations. I arrived at the church about 7:00 p.m. and saw a man in the uniform of a deputy sheriff shining a long flashlight on the license plates of cars parked in the church's parking lot and copying down the numbers from these license plates. I saw about three city police and three sheriff's cars there. Two of these cars were parked near the church and the others were being driven around in the vicinity of the church by uniformed officers. The meeting began about 7:30 p.m. Rev. Bevel of Dallas County, a Negro, began the meeting with a prayer. Mrs. Foster, *an instructor B.L.* ~~the secretary~~ of the Voters League, told everyone that the purpose of the meeting was to encourage people to become voters. Hymns and freedom songs were sung and Jackson L. Lawson presented a citation to Mrs. M. M. Boynton on behalf of her late husband. Mrs. Boynton responded with her thanks and Rev. Anderson led a memorial prayer for Mr. Boynton. A financial appeal was made on behalf of the Voters League by Mr. Lindsey, a Selma Negro and then I spoke about the importance of voting and the need to encourage people to become

registered voters. I introduced Rev. Bevel who spoke about voting and urged the Negroes there to work on getting people registered in Dallas County. Mr. Gilderslove, ^{A.L.} vice-president of the Voters League, made an appeal for voter registration, announced when the clinics would be held, talked about the work of the Voters League and told when registration would be held at the courthouse in July. Rev. Cleveland closed the meeting at about 9:45 with remarks and a benediction. There were no disturbances during the meeting. I believe there were about 500 Negroes from Dallas County at the meeting. Just like the last mass meeting on May 1, there were two deputy sheriffs and, I believe, a Dallas policeman, inside the church throughout the meeting. One of the deputy sheriffs, again Butler, had a walkie-talkie and he used it during the meeting. The other two officers took notes. There was a photographer, whom I recognized as being from the Dallas Times-Journal, at the meeting and he walked around the church taking pictures of the Negroes in the church. When the meeting was over I went outside the church and saw some of the sheriff's posse, wearing khaki clothes and guns and helmets, sitting in cars parked outside the church and driving around in cars near the church. Newspaper articles about this mass meeting, stating that I was one of the speakers, appeared the following day, June 12, in the Montgomery Advertiser and the Birmingham News.

B.D.

On the evening of June 12, a Tuesday, the Voters League had a regularly scheduled voter's clinic at Franklin Street in Dallas. Only one person showed up so the Voters League officers soon had a committee meeting. When it was over, about 10:30 p.m., I and a 17 year old Negro boy from Dallas County named Perry Shaw, who has been helping the Voters League in its work, got into my car. I planned to drive him home and then go to my home. After crossing the intersection of Alabama Avenue while going north on Washington Avenue, we noticed that a sheriff's car was behind us with a flashing light. We pulled over to the curb and stopped. I got out of my car and Deputy Sheriff Weber and another officer got out of the sheriff's car. Weber asked to see my driver's license and I showed it to him. He said he had a warrant for my arrest and he had a folded paper in my hand. I asked him what the charge was and he said it was

vagrancy. I was then taken by Decker to the county jail on Alabama Avenue where I was searched. At the jail I asked Decker if I could see the warrant but he didn't let me read it. I asked him why I was being arrested for vagrancy and Decker said he was following orders. I found out later that Sheriff Clark had sworn out a warrant for my arrest on vagrancy. I was placed in a cell with ^{Black B.L.} Louis Reese and the following morning I was fingerprinted and photographed. That afternoon I was released after Mrs. Marie Foster and Henry Shannon, both barbers of Selma, signed a \$500 property bond for me. Both before and after my arrest, no one from the sheriff's office, the Selma police or anyone else has ever talked to me about how much money I had or whether I was employed.

This was not my first arrest. Since I helped organize in February, 1960, the Nashville Non-Violent Movement, an affiliate of SNCC, when I was a student at the Seminary in Nashville, I have been arrested approximately nine times. All of these arrests have been connected with my activities with SNCC or with other civil rights activities and I have never been arrested or convicted of any offense not arising from my civil rights activities.

I was tried for vagrancy on June 20 in the county court in Selma before a judge. I was found not guilty. I was defended by attorney Chestnut of Selma and Bay of Montgomery. The Voters League is going to pay for the legal expenses.

As a SNCC field secretary, all of my personal and work expenses are paid for by SNCC, including room, board, transportation, telephone, postage, office supplies and printing. I telephoned the SNCC office in Atlanta to tell them of my financial needs and they sent me money. I account in detail to SNCC for all money I receive from SNCC and I operate on a specific budget. When I was arrested on June 16, I had \$27.75 with me. I do not owe any money to anyone in Selma or Dallas County. I pay \$40 a month rent for my apartment and the rent was paid in advance for the month of June at the time of my arrest.

Bernard Lafayette
BERNARD LAFAYETTE, JR.

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

P. K. Lindsey, N.P.
Notary Public