

Edwin King: Exerpts from manuscript on Jackson Movement,
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Injunctions in Jackson

The NAACP promised us "massive legal action" against segregation in Jackson to replace the direct action of the people. A number of legal efforts were made but the Southern courts guaranteed that these would drag on for years. The lawyers who came from other states to help us were good people and often expressed their personal support for more direct action. But that was not allowed. The shift to the courts instead of the streets was a sure sign of retreat by the NAACP. Now they were moving back in time to a period when they felt more comfortable, the "golden age" of the NAACP. Back, back, back we went--to 1959, prior to the first student sit ins in Greensboro, North Carolina. Then back, back, back to the early fifties, prior to that outrageous bus boycott by that young minister in Montgomery, Alabama.

The Jackson Movement did need legal action but this legal fight had to go on side by side with the struggle of the people in the streets. The struggle was necessary not just to break the will to resist of the white community, but, even more importantly, to give the local Black people a vital role in the struggle for their own freedom. Legal action alone could never

involve enough people in the action for the people ever to take advantage of distant court victories. Unless the people were directly involved there might be minor adjustment in the law but never significant changes in the social customs. But a legal battle, with the role of the people limited to that of fund raising and membership, was a comfortable thing for leaders in New York--and in Washington. The Kennedy administration must have been pleased with the shift in the Jackson Movement back to traditional methods. The government would have preferred this everywhere. If Martin King would just stick to preaching, and if SNCC would just try to register people to vote in traditional voter drives, then the liberal government of America could work with the liberal Negro leadership embodied in Roy Wilkins and the NAACP. The distant experts could hold White House Conferences to plan for a gradual process of controlled and managed racial change. This way the status of the NAACP leaders was not threatened by the possibility of new leaders rising from the people. This way the status of the liberal government was not threatened by too much activity in the civil rights field when the administration preferred to focus on some other matter. This "enlightened" leadership wanted no participation, no involvement of the people, just the gratitude and confidence, the dollars and votes of the people.

As the shift to the courts revealed the end of the direct action movement, despite the hundreds of arrests to date, the

City of Jackson made a shift to the courts. The City appealed to the Hinds County Chancery Court for help. Judge J. C. Stennett responded with a "temporary" injunction prohibiting racial demonstrations. Now the City was on the offensive. The traditional racial balance of power had been restored.

The case was labeled "CITY OF JACKSON VS. JOHN R. SALTER, JR., ET AL." The focus was clearly on Tougaloo College although the injunction was broad enough to include everyone. Twelve persons were named: Medgar Evers, Gloster Current, Mercedes Wright, Willie Luddon, all of NAACP; Dave Dennis of CORE; James Jones of SNCC; Charles Jones (Dean of Campbell College, a Black Methodist junior college open to the Movement), and five persons representing Tougaloo College--Bettie Poole and Johnnie Frazier (agitating students), John Salter (faculty), Ed King (Chaplain and Dean of Students), and Dr. A. D. Beittel (President), and, representing the courage and decency of all people of good will, Dick Gregory.

Organizations were also listed in the injunction:
"NAACP, CORE, AND THE TRUSTEES OF TOUGALOO UNIVERSITY... THEIR AGENTS, MEMBERS, EMPLOYEES, ATTORNEYS, SUCCESSORS, AND ALL OTHER PERSONS IN ACTIVE CONCERT WITH THEM." (1)

Significantly the list did not name a single Black minister or businessman in Jackson. Medgar was convinced that this was an

attempt to divide^d the Black community and to separate these men from him and the Movement.

The injunction covered every possible act or thought of protest, at any possible place in Jackson, at any time, and by any person:

NOW, THEREFORE, you are hereby commanded and temporarily enjoined, ... from engaging in, sponsoring, inciting or encouraging, ... and from performing acts calculated to cause breaches of the peace in the City of Jackson, Hinds County, Mississippi, ... from conspiring to engage in... and from doing any acts designed to consummate conspiracies to engage in said unlawful acts of parading, demonstrating, ... (congregating on the streets or public places as mobs, ... boycotting ... unlawful picketing ... of business establishments or public buildings) ... or other unlawful acts and from engaging in acts and conduct customarily known as "kneel-ins" in churches in violation of the wishes and desires of said churches.

In theory picketing and such things were legal in Jackson--but were never allowed. (Even labor unions had great difficulty with the Mississippi laws). Although it was

unconstitutional the City would allow no picketing, etc., without an approved city permit. Medgar Evers had applied for permits to picket and to hold protest marches but was not surprised when he did not receive them. It was not likely that the City of Jackson would issue a permit for Blacks to mount a picket line in front of a segregated lunch counter or a clothing store that would not allow Black women to try on dresses--much less give a permit for Medgar Evers to lead a group of Tougaloo students in picketing City Hall, with signs proclaiming wild ideas like: "STOP POLICE BRUTALITY," or, even worse, "LET'S TALK, JACKSON NEEDS A BI-RACIAL COMMITTEE"

If the injunction was vague at any point we could imagine how Mayor Thompson, Capt. Ray, and the white judge and jury would interpret it. Now any conversation might be a conspiracy to perform "acts calculated to cause breaches of the peace in the City of Jackson, Hinds County, Mississippi."

The injunction was issued on Thursday, June 6. The Movement was so quiet by this time that those of us at Tougaloo College had settled down into the first week of Summer School. I was in my office in the back of the chapel building that morning when two students came rushing in. I could hear them clattering through the church as they dashed down the aisles then leaped to the platform with a loud thud and headed through the door to my

office. "Dean King," one student shouted, "there's white police or sheriffs or something on campus. They're looking for you. They're up at the Mansion with Dr. Beittel right now." He gave out of breath and the other man picked up the story. "They caught Mr. Salter walking out of his class. They didn't arrest him but gave him some papers." All week we had heard rumors of a court injunction against the Movement so I realized what was happening. I thought that, perhaps, if I was not personally served with the papers I might not be legally bound to obey the action. And I still remembered the efforts a few weeks earlier to evade service and flee the state by the all white crew of Dr. D. W. Colvard, the President of Mississippi State University, Wade Walker, the athletic director, and Coach Babe McCarthy, and their white basketball team invited to play in an interracial tourneyment in far off America.

Then we heard white voices on the front porch of the chapel. "Is this the college chapel? Is this where Rev. King's office is?" A Black coed answered him, in the traditional Southern Black pose of ignorance. "The chapel? The chapel? What chapel? Now, sir, I just don't know anything about any chapel," she murmured innocently, standing under the wooden arches supporting the steeple and bell tower. Leaning back against the colored glass windows she continued, "Why don't you go to that building up there," she pointed away, "that's where the school offices are. Maybe Rev. King is up there."

A second white voice cut in, "Hell, I can tell this is the church. We were just up there and they said his office was down here. Let's go in."

The conversation gave us a chance to lock my office door and make an escape. The only normal exit was through the sanctuary and out the two front doors. The officers would have caught us. So we chose to descend the back fire escape. Then we crossed behind the chapel and the gymnasium, staying near the edge of the woods. Circling the student union building we came up to Salter's house--but he had already gone to my house to warn me. We were afraid there might be other police watching my front door so we crossed the football field and made our way through the high grass and on up to my back door. John had already told Jeannette to go visit the Garners, several houses away, so she could not be home to receive the injunction order. As John and I were talking in a back room we heard a car drive up in front. It was the deputy sheriffs again. While John went to the front door to talk to them I started to head back out the back door. Then, my spy instinct highly aroused, I realized that this time one of the officers probably would be watching the back door while the other one rang my front door bell. But I was not about to be trapped. I silently pushed out the screen and climbed out a window on the side of the house. Here I was protected by shrubbery for a few feet. Then I dashed from bush to bush until I made the shelter of our prize vegetable garden. I crouched

among the half grown okra stalks that Jeannette and I had planted at a more peaceful time in the spring. Cautiously I reached the end of the prickly green line of okra and made the security of a high hedge. Once beyond the hedge I made a daring dash through some faculty backyards and reached my goal--the tomato plants and bean and squash vines of Margrit Garner's garden. After a few minutes of discreetly wallowing in the vegetables like a rooting hog I crept up and and knocked softly on the back door. John Garner admitted me.

The telephone was ringing. It was for me. "Tell them I'm not here," I whispered, but Margrit assured me it was only John Salter on the phone. "Well, John, I made it. Where are the police?"

"They're gone, you can come home now," John sort of sighed. "They said they didn't have to serve you personally. They just nailed the damned injunction to your front door."

Again I realized I had no future with the CIA. Neither did Salter. Our cloak and dagger efforts had somehow crossed up deputy sheriffs, James Bond, Martin Luther, and an exotic okra patch. As I walked back to my house I ruefully looked at the tender turnip greens I had stomped.

The City injunction produced consternation in the NAACP staff working with our campaign. Medgar Evers had been expecting this and was not too concerned. He insisted that some kind of demonstrations had to continue, even in defiance of the injunction. Calls to New York NAACP offices got the word that we were not to defy the injunction. Dave Dennis, John Salter, and I supported Medgar. There was no question where the Tougaloo students stood, even those named in the injunction. A compromise was reached with the national NAACP. Small scale demonstrations would be staged in open defiance of the injunction--but the name "NAACP" could no longer be painted on any poster or printed on any Movement leaflets.

The day after the injunction was issued we had 47 arrests, mostly teenagers who had been playing softball in one of the former "White" city parks. Although the mayor had said the parks were open the police said this was too big a group and ordered them to leave the park. The kids started walking away from the park and were arrested for "blocking traffic." Others were arrested in attempted cafe sit-ins and in picketing on Capital Street with anti-segregation posters. None of us listed in the injunction were arrested for such a clear violation of the court order. The only major points of the injunction that had not been defied were mass marches and church "kneel-ins." The national NAACP might be innocent but the rest of us ^{including Medgar Evers,} were still "conspiring" and even "consumating conspiracies."

