

Freedom Day in Canton (Feb, 1964)

Canton, Mississippi, is the seat of Madison County, a short drive north of Jackson. Blacks make up 72% of the county's population, but only 1% of them are registered to vote (compared to 97% of the white population). In early 1964, Canton and Meridian are the two main centers of CORE organizing in Mississippi.

February 28 is Freedom Day in Canton. On a chill winter morning, 150 Blacks march from the CORE Freedom House to the county courthouse to register to vote. Some 250 more come in from the county by car, foot, and mule-drawn wagon, to form one of the largest voting-rights demonstrations in Mississippi to date. For five hours they wait in the cold. They are harassed and threatened by 50 law enforcement officers armed with shotguns and tear gas. Only five of the 400 or so Blacks are admitted to the Registrar's office to take the literacy test.

A few days later, 2,600 Black students stage a one-day class boycott to protest the appalling conditions of their segregated schools. Fifteen CORE and SNCC organizers are arrested for leading the protest.

From <http://www.crmvet.org/tim/timhis64.htm#1964canton>