

CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION

Notice to Close File

File No. 144-41-3578

03/24/2010
Date _____

To: Chief, Criminal Section

Re: Unknown Subject(s)
Natchez, Mississippi;
Vincent Dahmon (Deceased) - Victim
CIVIL RIGHTS

It is recommended that the above case be closed for the following reasons:

Case Synopsis

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) initiated an investigation into this matter based on a 1966 article titled "The cost is high," under the byline of Lincoln Lynch, then Associate National Director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). The article, which was apparently directed to CORE members, states that Vincent Dahmon, age 65, of Natchez, Mississippi, was shot by members of the KKK "during the time of the Meredith March" (the 1966 "March Against Fear" from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi, initiated by James Meredith, during

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To: Records Section
Office of Legal Administration

The above numbered file has been closed as of this date.

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Chief, Criminal Section

which Meredith was shot and wounded).

The FBI interviewed Meredith, who stated adamantly that the story was an untrue rumor. Several other civil rights activists similarly stated that they had no recollection of the alleged murder. All of the other investigative steps also yielded no information or evidence supporting the allegations.

2008 Federal Review:

In the fall of 2008, the FBI initiated a review of the circumstances surrounding the victim's death, pursuant to the Department of Justice's "Cold Case" initiative and the "Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act of 2007," which charges the Department of Justice to investigate "violations of criminal civil rights statutes . . . result[ing] in death" that "occurred not later than December 31, 1969." The FBI contacted numerous Mississippi agency officials; sent letters to, and contacted officials at the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the NAACP, and the Mississippi Crime Laboratory requesting information; conducted searches of the internet, the *Madison County Herald*, the *Natchez Democrat*¹, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), and the records of the SPLC and the University of Southern Mississippi library; and solicited information about the case via a press release that was published in local newspapers and broadcast on local television and radio stations.

The FBI interviewed James Meredith, who stated adamantly that the story of the Vincent Dahmon was an untrue rumor.

The FBI also interviewed several other civil rights activists: former NAACP State Field Director Charles Evers; Earnest McBride, Contributing Editor of the Jackson Advocate newspaper; Mississippi Representative Jim Evans; Mamie Mozee, Secretary of the NAACP during the '60s; XXXXX and XXXXX, the Reverend Leon Howard, Doctor Gene Young, and XXXXXX. Evers stated that he was familiar with Dahmon's name but had no other information. McBride stated that the 1966 March Against Fear did not travel through Natchez. Evans, XXXX, XXXX, Mozee, Reverend Howard, and XXXXX all stated that he had never heard of the alleged shooting. Dr. Young, who participated in the March Against Fear, similarly stated that he did not recall any such incident during the march. Both McBride and Evans stated that the case might have been confused with the murder of Vernon Dahmer.²

¹ An FBI case agent also contacted the *Natchez Democrat* Office Manager who stated that a fire had destroyed all of their records for the relevant time period.

² Vernon Dahmer was a prominent civil rights activist who led voter registration drives in Mississippi in the 1960's. On the night of January 10, 1966, two carloads of KKK members set Dahmer's home and adjacent grocery store, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, on fire and then fired shotguns at the home to ensure the family could not escape alive. Dahmer returned fire from inside the house as his family escaped from rear windows. The perpetrators drove off but

The FBI contacted the Canton Police Department, the Madison County District Attorney's Office, the Natchez Police Department³, the Adams County Sheriff's Department, the Adams County Coroner's office, the Adams County Voter's Registration Office, the Mississippi Attorney General's Office (MAGO), the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation (part of the Mississippi Department of Public Safety), the Mississippi Bureau of Vital Records (MBVR) but none of those agencies had any records relevant to the death of Vincent Dahmon⁴. A specific inquiry with the MBVR for the death certificate of Vincent Dahmon yielded no certificate. The FBI also checked the Adams County Chancery and Circuit Court offices, but found no relevant information.

In response to the FBI's letter requesting information, the Mississippi Crime Laboratory conducted a search of its records from mid-1966 (when it came into existence) through January 1968⁵ and found no information relating to Vincent Dahmon.

The FBI located two funeral homes in Natchez, one of which was closed and the other was reportedly not integrated at the time of the alleged shooting. The FBI then attempted to locate a third funeral home but was unsuccessful.

As of the date of this memorandum, the letters directed to the NAACP and the SPLC and the press release have yielded no information. The FBI also conducted a search of SPLC records, but found none relevant to Dahmon's death.

Legal Analysis

This matter does not constitute a prosecutable violation of the federal criminal civil rights statutes. Despite undertaking numerous investigative steps, the FBI did not locate any information or evidence supporting the allegations that a man named Vincent Dahmon was shot and killed during the 1966 March Against Freedom. Indeed, the only information or evidence located that indicates that someone named Vincent Dahmon even existed is the unsupported CORE article, and the statement of Charles Evers that Evers was familiar with Dahmon's name. It appears more likely that somehow this case was confused with the murder of Vernon Dahmer.

Dahmer died later that day as a result of the burns he sustained. Numerous KKK members were charged and state trials and a federal trial followed. Four of the 14 men involved in the murder were convicted in federal court. Sam Bowers, who ordered the murder was tried several times by the state but each trial resulted in a mistrial. In 1998, the state tried Bowers again, based on new evidence. Bowers was convicted and sentenced to a life term. He died in prison in 2005.

³ An FBI case agent personally searched the records of the NPD.

⁴ The march traveled through Madison County but the CORE report indicated that Dahmon was from Natchez, which is in Adams County.

⁵ The FBI had requested information concerning 41 cold case deaths, all of which had occurred prior to January 1968.

Accordingly, this matter lacks prosecutive merit and should be closed. For the same reason, the matter will not be forwarded to the state for prosecutive review. AUSA Glenda Haynes, Southern District of Mississippi, concurs in this recommendation.