



FREEDOM CITY -- WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT GOT STARTED

Freedom City was founded by former cotton-field workers who are no longer needed on the plantations because of mechanization, tighter acreage controls and new weed-killing chemicals.

Choosing to stay in Mississippi rather than emigrate to northern slums (as some half a million Mississippi Negroes have done since 1950) they are trying to start a new town based on small industry, open to everyone willing to work, and governed by all its residents.

The National Council of Churches' Delta Ministry helped the people acquire 400 acres, and provides staff and volunteers to assist the people in achieving their goals. This help includes adult literacy training, tutoring for school children, help in establishment of home industries, seeking larger industry for an economic base, and finding appropriate assistance from government and foundations.

Some of the families joined the Poor Peoples Conference -- the name by which Freedom City's people have banded together -- during the protest at the Greenville Air Force Base in January, 1966. Others joined the group since, while they were living either in tents near Greenville or at the Mount Beulah Center near Edwards.

With considerable difficulty and after many disappointments, the 400 acres of Freedom City were bought. The people moved into temporary pre-fabricated homes early in July.

SOME OF FREEDOM CITY'S RESIDENTS

Mr. Casey Robinson, president of the Poor Peoples Conference, was a skilled farm equipment operator -- at \$6 a day, sunrise to sunset -- on a plantation in Sunflower County. He came with his wife and 10 children in February, 1966 to Mount Beulah.

Mrs. Willie Jane Eaton and her 10 children were asked to leave a Sunflower county plantation where she had worked 22 years because she was about to have another baby and couldn't work. The baby was 3 days old when the family came to Mount Beulah.

Mrs. Savannah Williams and her children had lived on a plantation in Bolivar County all their lives. None of the children had ever gone to the school, a one-room shack, because it was too far away. They joined the Poor Peoples Conference at the Air Force Base because there was no money left from the crop, no food in the house, and no help from the plantation owner. Six of the children are now going to school.

Mrs. Ora D. Wilson came with four of her 8 children from Indianola, where for 22 years she had gone out to do day labor in the fields. Active in the freedom movement in Indianola, she was cut off welfare in 1965 after spending 20 days in the Jackson stockade for demonstrating, along with 1,000 others, at the state capitol.



Residents (cont'd)

Mr. Clay Miller with his wife and four children had lived on the same plantation all their lives until they came to the air base sit-in during the bitter cold of January, 1966. When he went back a few weeks later to get his meagre furniture, the plantation owner had him arrested. Now the cook for Freedom City's cafeteria, Mr. Miller hopes to get professional training as a chef.

Mr. John Hoskins, 70, and his family left a Sunflower county plantation because the owner wouldn't let him work any more and wouldn't let the children forage for firewood. It was 18⁰ the week they left.

Mrs. Ida Mae Lawrence, a midwife and a leader in civil rights activities in Rosedale, joined the Poor Peoples Conference just before the air base incident. She has a son in college and three children in the formerly all-white school which 22 of Freedom City's children attend.

Mr. Arcola Butler had spent all his 35 years on the same plantation in Panola County. Like several other Freedom City adults, he is now learning to read and write.

Mr. Walter Abney and his wife joined the PPC from a plantation in Sunflower County where they had worked 12 years because they wanted "a house and a job."



HOW YOU CAN HELP

Freedom City is not a charity project. It is a self-help project.

But until the first successful crop is harvested and there is a means of employment, the Poor Peoples Conference will need financial help from those who share their dream.

Some of the costs involved in getting the project under way are described on the following pages. There is no provision in the Delta Ministry budget for these costs, although DM expends much energy in raising additional money for the PPC to meet these expenses:

- Temporary housing: getting the families out of the barn
- Subsistence: the cost of living
- The farm program: getting the crop in the ground
- Education: adult, pre-school and tutoring

Contributions should be sent to P.O. Box 457, Greenville, Miss. 38702. Checks should be made out either to the Delta Opportunities Corporation, which administers the food and housing funds, or to the Delta Ministry, designated for Freedom City. In the latter form, gifts are tax-deductible.



FREEDOM CITY'S FUTURE

The people are not trying to build utopia -- just a place free of the oppressive restrictions put on Negroes elsewhere in Mississippi, and where they can earn a decent wage, educate their children, and build a home.

They also hope this pilot project might lead other Mississippians to stay in the state and find solutions to their problems, whether in other "freedom villages" or in the towns where they already live.

Much of the hope for Freedom City has hinged upon a self-help housing grant proposed by the federal government in February, 1965. The request for the grant, despite many assurances by federal officials that funding is imminent, and despite the promise of \$125,000 in matching funds from a major foundation, is still snarled in red tape and hostile political pressure.

The grant, to be made to Delta Opportunities Corporation, would provide the money for materials for 100 homes, plus the staff for a complete training program in the construction trades. The people would build and own their own homes, and learn a trade while forming the nucleus of a growing town.

If the Mississippi political forces opposing the grant should win, Freedom City will continue, but the dream will be on a smaller scale. Private sources have already indicated a willingness to provide housing money and industrial capital.

In any event, the people plan to stay. And Delta Ministry plans to stay with them.



HOW YOU CAN HELP: THE COST OF LIVING

Decent diet and remedial health care for people who have been denied these things all their lives are expensive. Until they become self-supporting, the Poor Peoples Conference must have help in meeting these expenses each month:

Gas (cooking and heating)	\$360
School supplies	10
Medical expenses	200
Electricity	60
Transportation	200*
Vehicle Maintenance	50
Food	
General staples	520
Milk, juice, eggs	250
Meats	320

*Mostly the twenty-mile round trips into Greenville to the doctor's office



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HOW YOU CAN HELP: TEMPORARY HOUSING

The twenty laminated plastic homes in which the people lived during the summer were guaranteed for five years. But on November 10 a near-tornado made all of them unliveable; some were torn to shreds.

Since then several families, with 27 children, have been living in the barn. In early February, Freedom City was able to buy and move to the site three large old buildings, 26 by 50 feet. They are being partitioned into two apartments each.

Since it will be months, even after the funding of the self-help housing project, before permanent homes are available, the \$4,000 paid for the buildings and moving is considered a worth-while expense.

Contributions are needed for:

-- The cost of buying and moving the buildings	\$4,000
-- Cost of partitioning the buildings	2,000
-- Some furnishings, including gas ranges	1,500
-- Installing utilities and plumbing	3,000



HOW YOU CAN HELP: THE FARM PROGRAM

Of the 400 acres, about 300 are being tilled by the Poor Peoples Conference. The profits from winter wheat (to be harvested in early June) and soy beans (to be harvested next October) will make the payments on the land and help with subsistence costs.

Contributions are needed immediately to meet these costs of getting the crop started:

Fertilizer @ \$75 a ton	\$ 375
Soybean seeds (350 bushels)	1,400
Weed-killing chemicals	1,800
Gas and oil for tractors	2,000
Parts for machinery	2,000



HOW YOU CAN HELP: THE EDUCATION PROGRAM

The sad state of Mississippi education, and especially of Negro education in Mississippi, is reflected at Freedom City. Many of the children and some of the adults had never attended school at all.

Because of the low quality of rural Negro schools, the 22 Freedom City children now attending a formerly all-white school require nightly individual tutoring sessions to catch up. Delta Ministry staff members and volunteers from the Negro community in Greenville are now giving time to this work.

But a full-time, professionally trained director is needed for an education program which would strengthen the tutoring sessions and expand four other areas: classes for those not in school, pre-school education, adult education, and cultural enrichment.

Approximately \$12,700 would provide a professional director, additional subsistence workers (at \$30 per week) and \$50 per week for materials.

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Photographs of Freedom City by Nash Basom, Delta Ministry