

C19043

Mordant

No date

TO: RICHARD TINSLEY
FROM: TOM FONER
RE: HATTIESBURG REPORT

By far the endeavor with the most striking results, that I have taken part in was the Freedom Election. By the end of the four day voting period we had close to five hundred people who voted. The greatest amount of votes came from beat one; the beat I was covering. This was achieved by a constant propaganda effort, starting about a week before the election and picking up moments day by day right through the last day of voting. When I went out canvassing I was assisted by Margaret Burnside, a local Negro.

Efforts on my part to get Indians involved with our program have fallen far short of what I had hoped for. My approach was to write to the head of the Indian's bureau in Washington to try to get as much information as possible about the Choctaws of Mississippi. I also contacted Jackson to see what they could do. Then, after having read the material sent by the Federal Government as well as a series of articles specifically on Indian problems published in the Christian Science Monitor, as well as a book dealing completely with the history and customs of the Choctaw Indians, I attempted through Alvin Burnside (a local Negro with many Indian friends) to set up a meeting with members of the Choctaw community. This meeting took place but the participants refused to be committed to anything definite. A few days later Mr. Burnside and I went canvassing Indian houses, but the reaction of the people we spoke to was very disappointing. The major reason for the lack of contact seems to be the extreme fear of the Indians towards the white man, and their apathetic attitude towards change, also coupled with their tradition-oriented existence which demands that they do not make a major decision without the consent of the Chief. I am now trying to arrange a meeting between myself and the white Me ministers of the bombed Choctaw Church (they are supposed to be pretty liberal); and also a meeting with the chief.

Efforts on my part to try to start the nucleus of a Federal Project in the town; centering on the parents petitioning the High School for a free lunch program etc. has fallen apart because of the apathy of the Philadelphia Youth Club towards the idea. Since they would be essential to the plan, I decided to hold onto that for a later date.

Attempts at setting up Citizenship Classes have met with small scale success in the town in the form of a small group of people meeting in a local person house to discuss the meaning and demands of good citizenship and to go over the voting tests with me. I am now in the process of sitting this program up in the Stello area, and I have gotten the consent of Mr. & Mrs. Betts to use their house for this purpose.

In my eyes the major problem to the whole project at this time is the lack of money. I feel that the remedy to that problem

will come during Christmas when George Smith will be coming to stay at my house in New York, to take part in a fund raising speaking tour I set up during my recent trip to my home. I also got assurances then from a group of people that they would raise money for us, and that money should be arriving soon.

For a winter program I would suggest a maximum propaganda effort so that we can face the spring with a great mass of local Negro support. Also some effort should be made to raise funds for the creation of local Negro business, such as a competitor Laundromat.