[Teaching the Movement]

American history always seemed both dull and irrelevent to me as a student.

In fact, only after I was working in civil rights did I become interested in the social movements of the 1930's, the history of the South and the Negro. When my civil rights work began to deal with questions of jobs and employment, I wanted to know about labor history and the Populist Movement. That is, only after I saw the value of learning about the background of a phenomenon occuring in the present, did historical study interest me.

For the above reason, in the following curriculum, I will reverse the normal order for teaching American history. I will start with the present and work backwards. For example, only after the children are familier with the dynamics of the South today will they study how these developed.

Also, instead of starting with national decisions, history of government or the study of heroes, I will begin with a person or a family living in a particular period of history. First we identify with real people and their lives; then we ask questions about the forces that made their lives thus, including economics, politics, etc. The importance of a certain piece of legislature or the difference it makes when a certain person is elected president then is clear.

UNIT ONE: THE SOUTH TODAY

In parts of the South, Negro families are completely at the mercy of the powers in their community. Studying such a family can therefore point out just what influences people's lives. So we start with a Negro family -- a real, not hypothetical one. (This helps the children sympathize and identify and adds to research possibilities.)

The following family lives in Columbus, Mississippi:

Mr. Ponder, 33 yrs. girls: 15, 14, 4 yrs.
Mrs. Ponder, 32 yrs. boys: 10, 6 yrs.

Family owns a small house with several tiny rooms located on a dirt road in the city. Neither parent graduated from grade school, both can read. Mother used to work as maid, now works as waitress at nearby Air Force base. Father does heavy labor for Weyerhaeuser Company.

To help the children see a family, not simply statistics, I give them everyone's name and tell a little about their personality. I describe the house and the block the family live on and say a little about what that section of Mississippi (Northeast) is like. I give the class an indication of the areas they can persue in studying this family and let them choose.

Very real could not mis with mos child

The following is an outline of the areas and teaching methods:

1. Personal (sociology)

If possible, I would have the family make a tape about themselves. The children could certainly write as pen pals. ++

Class could discuss how the parents moved off farms and into city; age of marriage, number of children; who takes care of children while parents work 60 hours/week; housework and duties of children;

children's school and social life; movies, music, t.v., etc. that they like; foods they eat; etc.

Mrs. Ponder took care of the child of the white family she worked for until the child was four (when Mrs. Ponder was fired for trying to register to vote). That is, she spent most of her waking hours raising a white child while her own children were watched by their older sisters. The class could dramatize this, trying to project how both sets of children and the Negro mother feel about it. The class could then read excerpts from Lillian Smith's Strange Fruit about how a white boy who loved his Mammy learns to accept Negroes as inferior, and from James Baldwin who has written about this ~~situation~~ from the view of the Negro child.

2. Police

When Cecil Ponder, 14, was 12, she, Mr. and Mrs. Ponder and younger children were driving at night and were stopped by two (white) policemen. After questioning them, the police told Cecil to get out of the car. The Mother intervened with, "She's only 12." The police knew of the family as "good n... ." and decided not to bother them further. The class could do a socio-drama of this, taking the roles of the various people. They could also discuss why the Mother spoke out to protect the daughter and not the father. What does it mean when your parents can't protect you? How common are incidents like this? Who decides that policemen have to be white? Who decides what policemen can and cannot do?

Some touchy identification here. Teacher would need to be very sensitive to feel

3. Jobs

For this and other areas, the class can subscribe to the Columbus,

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Mississippi daily.

Since adult jobs may not mean much to a seventh grade class, we could talk about jobs in terms of what clothes and toys the parents can afford to buy the children and the amount of time the parents must spend away from home.

The children could do dramatizations of a maid's job and a heavy laborer's job, beginning simply with: pretend you're scrubbing a bath tub. More complicated dramatizations would deal with how a maid and laborer feel about their jobs.

We could discuss such questions as: who decides what a job will be like -- pay, hours, work? What can people do to improve these? What happens when a person asks the boss for changes? What if all the workers ask? We could talk about what unions are, including questions such as: why is there a union for waitresses, but none for maids? etc.

The children could do research on unions in Mississippi and in Weyerhaeuser Co. where Mr. Ponder works. (The federal and state governments, the AFL-CIO, and the company all publish information. Plus, information on Weyerhaeuser is available in several industrial manuals and could be simplified by the teacher) The children could discuss why Weyerhaeuser, one of the biggest industries in the U.S., which has locals of over 35 different trade unions, has fired workers who tried to unionize in Columbus, Miss. We could discuss why the right-to-work law was incorporated into the Mississippi Constitution. Why companies move from the North to the South? (We could examine a brochure or ad from the Mississippi State Chamber of Commerce and relevant newspaper articles.) Which jobs

do Negroes have? whites? How does their separation prevent formation of strong unions? Who benefits from this and who loses? If we wanted to go into more detail, we could discuss federal laws made to protect workers forming unions, including the NLRA, and why Mr. Ponder is not protected by these laws.

4. Voting

The Mother lost her job because she tried to register to vote. (The explanation given her by her employer was that she was rude to the registrar!) The class could discuss why she wanted to vote. I then show the filmstrip, "The Peoples Wants Freedom" (sic) made in Mississippi in 1964 about Negroes who wanted to register and why. The class could learn songs about voting: If you miss me from the cotton field/ and you can't find me nowhere/ come on over to the court house/ I'll be registering up there...

We could then do dramatizations of Mrs. Ponder going to the court house to register.

The children can discuss why the white people do not want Mrs. Ponder to vote. We talk about "status quo" and why people are afraid of changing it and what whites could lose if Negroes voted. We can also decide who we think is qualified to vote. What about someone who cannot read? What if a person cannot read but lives in a small town and has known the two men running for sherrif since they were children? What if people cannot read because there were no schools for them to go to when they were children? Is voting a right or privledge or way for different groups to live peacefully together? Mrs. Ponder tried to register after the Civil Rights laws were ~~past~~ passed. Why didn't they protect her?

5. Additional Areas

Neither Mrs. Ponder's right to vote nor Mr. Ponder's right to unionize were protected by the federal government in spite of existing federal legislation. A study of why the federal government does not help them would involve studying political power on the national level: the power of Mississippi's Senators over legislation and appropriations and hence the unwillingness of the executive branch (president and justice dept.) to cross them.
(Much good first-hand material is available including Senate hearings on the incident in which the Kennedy administration did not allot federal money to Mississippi for a redevelopment program (ARA) and Stennis (D-Miss.) threatened to hold up appropriations for other states.)

Comparison could be made of the Ponders and a family in Harlem, a poor white Mississippi family, a wealthy Mississippi family.

Segregated education and the question of education and no available jobs could be discussed. Also, the grammer and idioms in the letters from the Ponders - is our grammer correct and theirs wrong?

Perhaps a young person who grew up in Mississippi could come talk to the class.