

Council of Federated Organizations  
1017 Lynch St. P.O. Box 2896  
Jackson, Mississippi 39205

Dear Friends:

The purpose of this letter is to tell you a little about the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project which the Council of Federated Organizations is sponsoring this summer. We have learned that this project is causing fear and hostility in the white community, because it has been characterized as an "invasion" of "several thousand" college students intent upon "agitating" and causing "violence". We believe that this hostility is based upon a misunderstanding of the program, and that an explanation of the project's intent and scope is needed to allay the fears of white people in Mississippi.

The Mississippi Freedom Summer project has come about because the people of COFO have reached this conclusion: The struggle for freedom in Mississippi cannot be won without the substantial aid of the country as a whole, backed by the federal government. We support the statement of Prof. James Silver of the University of Mississippi, that "As yet there is little evidence that the society of the closed mind will ever possess the moral resources to reform itself, or the capacity for self-examination, or even the tolerance of self-examination." Therefore, we have committed our resources to a program where large numbers of Americans can come to Mississippi for two reasons: firstly, to dramatize the need for change in Mississippi. The second purpose is even more simple: they want to participate in the long, laborious process of bringing social services and social justice to a portion of the population which has been denied them throughout American history. The participants in the Freedom Summer project will devote themselves to bringing educational and cultural services to Negro Mississippians, to teaching them about the political life of the state and encouraging them to participate in it, and to contributing to the body of knowledge about their condition in Mississippi, so that more can be done to alleviate it.

The project itself will bring 800-1000 people to Mississippi. Of these, around 200 will be persons with particular professional interests - attorneys, ministers, teachers, folksingers, etc--who will come as independently-organized and -financed groups. They will devote themselves to research or service in their own areas of specialty. The rest of the participants will come at the invitation of COFO on an individual basis. They will be self-supporting and most of them will work in Mississippi for six to eight weeks, concentrating in three major programs, and several other, smaller programs which have been planned in advance by the staff of COFO.

1. Freedom Schools. Approximately 25 Freedom Schools are being planned in about that many Mississippi communities to serve high-school youth. The schools will run for six weeks in an informal, "school"ish atmosphere. The course of study will concentrate upon intensive remedial work in reading, writing, math and science, on a critical study of political and social issues, and on Negro history--because we feel that those are the areas where the public education which the state offers them has been most seriously neglected. To balance the program, there will also be cultural and recreational activities ranging from painting and creative writing to baseball and hiking. This program will use approximately 300 teachers and administrators.

2. Community Centers. The community centers program is not a "summer" project, but is planned to continue on a permanent basis after the summer, although with a reduced staff. The community center will serve as a public meeting place in the Negro community, and as the base for a battery of educational and recreational programs, as staff and facilities permit. Some of the educational programs to be offered are:

1. Literacy skills program
2. Vocational training--such as typing and shorthand, carpentry, accounting, etc.
3. Health programs--prenatal care, nutrition, etc.
4. Citizenship training
5. Home and farm improvement
6. Home management--such as sewing, budgeting, meal planning

The recreational program will offer activities for children, youth and adults, along the following lines:

1. Children--organized story-telling and games hours
2. Young people--"teen" rooms for dancing, ping-pong, etc.--and a place to study.
3. Adults--evening discussion groups and films.

Each center will also be equipped with a small library and reading room, open to anybody.

3. Voter Registration. The largest number of summer participants will work with COFO's political programs. The basic political program is voter registration, and the other political programs are related to voter registration and designed to encourage people to register. The political programs, briefly are:

1. Voter registration. Work in encouraging people to register, and assisting them with the literacy test and transportation difficulties.
2. Freedom Registration. An attempt to demonstrate the potential voting strength of Negroes in Mississippi and to dramatize the extent of the denial of the right to vote, by showing the effect discriminatory and unreasonable voting requirements.
3. Freedom Candidates for Congress. Campaigns of four Negro Mississippians running for Senate, and Congressional seats in the Second, Third, and Fifth Districts.
4. Freedom Democratic Party. A democratic party organization which encourages all people - Negro and white to participate in politics at the grass-roots level.

4. Other projects. There will be a few smaller projects, devoted primarily to research and specialized service in the white and Negro communities.

As you can see from this outline, the project gives no basis for the accusations which have been made incorrectly concerning the summer activity. There is no "invasion"; participants will be spread very thinly across the state in teams of four or five. (In the words of Jackson Deputy Police Chief, J.L. Ray, quoted in the Reporter magazine, "Spread them across the state,.. and a thousand ain't so many.") Estimate up to 30,000 "invaders" are similarly exaggerated; the approximate maximum figure of 1,000 participants represents our most realistic estimate of what we could recruit and administer efficiently. We feel that this program offers much to Mississippians, both Negro and white. The program, and the staff, will be concerned with constructive educational and political activities, not with bringing violence and chaos to the state.

The father of one of our summer applicants, a Methodist minister, wrote the following statement, which summarized our hopes, too: "I sincerely hope that this venture will be . . . effective in promoting justice and reconciliation in racial and sectional relationships."

We will welcome further inquiries about the program, addressed to COFO at the above address. Thank you.

Yours for Freedom Now,

Summer Project Staff  
Council of Federated Organizations