

ready: Jane Morris

[1964]

JM

MOSS POINT - JUNE 21-June 30

Sunday, June 21:

Charles Glen, Howard Kirschenbaum, Ron Ridenour, and Fred Meely arrived in Moss Point - five miles from the coast and 20 miles East of Biloxi - around noon. They first went to Pascagoula - pop. 17,000, about 3,000 Negro - into the Negro neighborhood. They met some people who knew "we" were coming. Mississippi project has been widely publicized by the NAACP, churches, TV, newspapers, radio, etc. They met a member of the local NAACP branch, a good man who gave them some information:

- 1) The city hired another 10, total of 15, Negroes on the police force. There are 150 men on the force, however the Negroes can't arrest whites, are not on the budget, have to buy their own weapons, etc. They are "flunkies" and "Toms". One killed a Negro some months ago and nothing was done, even though everyone knows the assaulted Negro did no wrong, but was a potential danger to the Power structure.
- 2) Jackson County pop. is over 55,500, about 19.6% Negro (10,864). 5113 Negroes are eligible to vote - about 1400 (24.4%) are registered. The main problem here is not outright discrimination in voting, but general discouragement and lack of understanding of the importance of voting on the part of many Negroes. It could be estimated that 3 out of 5 eligible Negroes who go to the court house become registered.
- 3) Be careful of Negro informers.
- 4) Always be conscious of danger - security, safety precautions and self-discipline.

Later we went to some cafe in Moss Point. They learned that our two best contacts were in Wash., D.C. at the national NAACP meeting. ~~But~~ Before long the general curiosity overcame the people. They had to know what 2 Negroes and 2 whites were doing together. They explained and everyone had some understanding of the project. They wanted to know more specifics and particularly why we were motivated to come south. ~~But~~

June 22:

Everywhere, people are interested in what is being done. Charles knows a few people and we have been talking to them., learning about community problems. On June 14, the Negro citizens had a memorial for Medgar Evers - a leaflet was hung up on small businesses - mostly cafes - announcing the services. Sheriff Byrd (County Sheriff) came around tearing down the signs and ordered all owners to see him. He told them that he could take away their licenses if they participated in any way with Civil Rights. We heard of people losing their jobs and being run out of town for speaking out, of burnings, jailings and beatings; of having few paved roads and no street or stop lights. 7.1% of the Negroes are unemployed - about 4% of the whites are unemployed - and over 50% of the Negroes are unskilled laborers. The average income of Negroes is \$606 while for whites it is \$2000 - annual income overall being \$1300, about 1/3 of the national income. ~~But~~ About 40% of the labor force is Negro, while Negroes make up only 4% of manufacturing and industry.

Monday afternoon, Mermie McKay arrived, and was taken to the home where she will stay all summer. Charles, Howie, Ron, and Fred were staying temporarily with a family after having spent the previous night in motels.