



Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

Why Mississippi?

Mississippi is an exception to the rule of dynamic growth in this country, and has been for over 150 years.

From the beginning representative government has been foreign to this state. Its legislature answered Emancipation with the Black Codes of 1865, reinstituting the conditions of slavery. Even though crop diversification has been introduced in recent years to save the soil ruined by the cotton crop, cotton planters still dominate the state's politics and economy. Their plantations are, as they were originally, commercial plants for the production of a paying crop.

One of the few advances made during Reconstruction that has been maintained is the public school system, but reduced to a poverty-stricken mockery of education. In the delta region less money is spent per pupil, black and white, than in any other state in the nation. • Even more chilling is the wide gap between black and white expenditures. North Pike County, for example, appropriated for the entire 1960-61 school year \$30.89 for each white student and 76 cents for each Negro student. Sunflower County that same year spent \$150 per white and \$60 per Negro pupil. Public school attendance is not compulsory. Teachers are bound by a loyalty oath to the state constitution, in many provisions a subversion of the Federal Constitution. Where a town or city has a public library, it is closed to Negroes. Inquiry or dissent is regarded as dangerous heresy. In 1960 all Negroes, 25 years old and over, had completed an average of only six years of school--five years less than the average white Mississippian. Education is used to keep the whites who control the state in control.

Before this summer's Mississippi Project began, there were an estimated 25,000 Negro registered voters, slightly over 6 percent of the voting-age Negro population. Yet Negroes are 42 percent of the state's two-million population.

A few vital statistics, from 1960 census figures, bare the raw conditions of life in Mississippi. The average annual per capita income

for white inhabitants was \$2,023 and for Negroes, \$606. Though Negroes composed almost 40 per cent of the total labor force, only 4½ percent were employed in manufacturing and even less in construction. More than 2/3 were in agricultural or service work.

Only 1/3 of the housing occupied or owned by Negroes was classified under "sound condition." The rest was substandard. In rural areas, in that sweltering climate, over 75 percent of Negro dwellings were without any piped water at all and over 90 percent had no flush toilets, no bathtubs and no showers.

In the modern trek from farm to city, only 5 percent of Mississippi's moving population was Negro, showing what little job opportunity the state's cities and towns offer them. When Negroes move, they move out of the state. And the most significant population change in twenty years (1940-60) has been the large drop in the number of Negroes aged 20-34 years, the traditionally preferred age-group in the labor market.

Death among Negroes in 1960 was at a higher rate than among whites in 1913, an index of the low standard of living and health care available. The chances of a Negro baby dying within the first year of life were, at best, twice those of a white baby.

This brief description gives only some of the rough conditions of life that called the Freedom Movement to Mississippi.

What the Summer Project Gave Mississippi

By the end of July approximately 2,165 Negro children, teenagers and adults in Mississippi were attending 41 Freedom Schools, staffed by 175 full-time teachers, organized by the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). Located in churches, private homes and backyards, these schools took up the enormous slack of the state's educational poverty. Despite the fear which shadows most Negro communities, with Freedom Schools and Centers burned and bombed and workers murdered, "several are demanding that COFO come in and set up schools," the Rev. Thomas Mahan, a Freedom School coordinator who is religious activities coordinator at New York University, reported during the summer.

These "new houses of liberty" taught Negro history, civics, American history, arts and crafts, drama, music, English, arithmetic, algebra and chemistry. Though teachers stressed the extraordinary value of the Negro history curriculum, several pointed out the popularity of chemistry and algebra. Pupils in the McComb School told director Ralph Featherstone, a 25-year old Negro speech teacher from Washington, D. C., that in the Mississippi school system algebra is first taught

Negro children in high school, while white children get it in the sixth grade. And Wahman noted that when the chemistry teacher left the Gulfport Freedom School, his fifteen students left in protest, returning only when another chemist was sent into the school.

Student rights such as this are quite new to Mississippi. In the spring of 1961 several Negro students in Jackson were expelled from high school because they had raised questions in their classrooms about the significance of the Freedom Rides. Last spring more than 800 students at Alcorn A & M College were tossed out of school for protesting social conditions on campus. The school's president called in the much-feared Mississippi Highway Patrol to help ship them home without the opportunity of collecting their belongings. At the white University of Southern Mississippi, also this spring, the president confiscated an issue of the student newspaper because it had carried an article critical of the school administration's refusal to admit a Negro applicant.

The meaning of the Freedom Schools was summed up by Mrs. Carolyn Reese, a Negro Detroit school teacher who administered the five schools in Hattiesburg, as "an exposure to a totally new field of learning, new attitudes about people, new attitudes about self, and about the right to be dissatisfied with the status quo. The children have had no conception that Mississippi is a part of the United States; their view of American history is history with no Negroes in it. It's like making a cake with no butter."

Along with Freedom Schools, the Mississippi Project had three other programs going this summer: community centers, voter registration and Freedom Registration. Centers were established in 13 communities, with 61 full-time workers in the arts, recreation and day care, libraries and health. Two are continuing as permanent institutions, with construction now underway.

Voter registration and the Freedom Registration drive went hand in hand with education. Figures are not yet available for voter registration across the state, but what happened in Greenwood graphically illustrates the voting problem in Mississippi. Between June 21 and July 31, 114 Negroes went to the courthouse to register; 123 were able to take the test; exactly 2 (two) of them were accepted and registered as voters. In contrast, during the same period, 3,384 Negroes in that city registered on the Freedom Registration drive. Before this summer, only 268 Greenwood Negroes were officially registered as voters. (As soon as state registration results are compiled, the newsletter will run a full report.)

Local Affairs

SNCC Benefit Concern Series:

November 14
William Warfield
Baritone

January 30
Rosalyn Tureck
Pianist

March 14
Budapest Quartet

\$12.50 for the series

Order by mail with your
check from

Mrs. Stanley Wiener
2 Santa Ana
S. F. - MO 1-5829

3000 Blue Chip stampbooks
will buy SNCC a bus for the
South. Send your Blue Chip
stamps (loose or in a book)
to your local SNCC group.

Flooded with clothing, books
and school supplies for ship-
ment South, East Bay SNCC asks
you to: bring in only clothing
in good condition; pack books
and clothing in a carton suit-
able for mailing; contribute
money, with clothing or books,
to help pay shipping costs.
SNCC in Greenwood advises that
schoolbooks and school supplies
are now top priority--not
clothing.

Rotating teams of lawyers, law students,
physicians, medical technicians and
nurses served as important auxiliaries
to many facets of the Summer Project.

The Mississippi Caravan of Music, by
the summer's end, had 25 professional
singers and musicians touring the state.
They performed and conducted workshops
in the Freedom Schools, community
centers and churches. The Free Southern
Theater, an integrated company, did
the circuit with "In White America,"
a documentary historical play by
Princeton professor Martin Duberman.

A 25-man crew, mostly white southerners,
initiated a pilot project in Mississippi's
poor white communities.

Fifteen summer volunteers conducted
research on existing or potential fed-
eral programs Mississippi needs.

About 400 ministers from across the
country participated in the Summer
Project under the direction of the
National Council of Churches Commission
on Religion and Race.

Though it's too early to assess the
impact of the Mississippi Project,
there is evidence that the state can-
not turn back on this summer's new
experience with freedom. Courage has
rubbed off person to person. Young
people have learned leadership. Negro
communities in many areas have unified.

Now that the summer volunteers are
leaving, Mississippi's officialdom may
react forcefully with new acts of vio-
lence. What supports come from the
Federal government, in enforcing the
Civil Rights Act, and from people
throughout the country will be vital
to the continuing growth of freedom in
Mississippi.