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1964

Holly Springs, Miss.--

Helping Mississippi Negroes express themselves has been one of the main activities of Pamela Parker of Solebury who is teaching in a freedom school in Holly Springs, only 30 miles from the Tennessee border. It is one of over thirty such schools established throughout the state by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

"There's too much creativity that's been stifled and it's bursting out of them," Miss Parker explains. "There's one woman who was married when she was 17, she's 25 now and has five children. Before she had no future. Now she writes and writes and she does have a future. She can't spell well, but I haven't been concerned with grammar. I've been grading papers for ideas." Another teacher has been covering grammar, Pamela points out.

"The first few days, I had them write about whatever they did. Many wrote on what had been said in class, but some were completely original. One girl, who's a Roman Catholic, wrote a paragraph saying that whites were working in Mississippi as a form of penance. We hadn't discussed anything like that in class. After they were

Parker -- add one

able to express themselves in writing, I encouraged more class discussion."

Another teacher outlined the ideas of a play on the life of Medgar Evers.

"Students improvised upon these ideas to produce a play with characters they feel a part of. Every time it's been produced it's been done a little bit differently, so everyone has to keep on their toes."

Pamela explains the results of the freedom school. "They're being confronted with different things to do, with different possibilities not faced before."

She teaches a class of about twenty 15 to 25 year old girls. Besides writing, <sup>she teaches</sup> the courses/include history and religion. The latter is Pam's major at Carleton College where she will be a junior this fall.

"As a part of Negro history I talked on the Haitian slave revolt and told them how the slaves took over the island country. Their faces lit up. But then they dimmed again when I mentioned that England sent ships. I told them that England failed and they began to feel proud again. Then I explained how Napoleon came to re-establish slavery. The kids knew that the Negroes didn't have a chance, especially after their leader was captured. But the Negroes won and I told the kids so and they grinned. Next we discussed why this couldn't work in our country which led to a discussion on United States slave revolts."

"Five students came ~~in~~ the first day the freedom school was held," Pam explains. "But the next day those five brought several more, and the classes have been expanding that way."

Parker -- add two

In her religion class, she explains, "We were to discuss the different views of God and man. But soon they were off on a tangent discussing evolution and discussing and interpreting the Bible.

"We also discussed racism and I tried to show that it isn't only whites against Negroes. I pointed out the situation of the Jews in Germany, the aristocrats hating the peasants in France, and all the nationality prejudices."

The Holly Springs Freedom School did have about 70 students. But after the first three weeks the Negro public school opened again for classes so that it could close in the fall and the students would be free to pick cotton. The school now meets every day at 4:30, after the public school closes. Classes end around seven. Still, about 40 students attend regularly.

"They're also still rehearsing the play which is to be produced in Meridian in the middle of August," Pamela explains. "And this Sunday, five girls are coming to discuss Lord of the Flies. This was a spontaneous decision on their part. And more things are starting all the time."