

1964

A resume of activities at Freedom Schools
with special emphasis on attendance--
conducted Friday, August 7

Because of the lack of a formal questionnaire, many of the questions asked were results of the conversation rather than a minute survey. However, the following figures and comments appear pertinent.

FRIEST CREEK SCHOOL--About 50 youngsters are attending the school on a regular basis. This is equally divided between youths of a younger age and the teenage group.

ST. ~~PAUL'S~~ ^{JOHN'S} SCHOOL--St. Paul's, adjoining the ~~Free~~ Priest Creek operation, is a relatively smaller one. At present, 21 students are enrolled. The children are younger, generally ranging in age from 14 years downward.

GENERAL COMMENT ON THESE TWO SCHOOLS: Our group viewed a debate between the schools on the use of violence to obtain civil rights. It was an impressive display of preparation and the marshalling of cogent arguments. Audience questioning also was excellent. The final vote, somewhat influenced by loyalty ties, was 17-13 in favor of violence.

MORNING STAR SCHOOL--This school has the most diversified program based on age groupings. There are about 15 youngsters regularly attending a morning class in the 8-10-year age bracket. Another class, of 11-12-year olds, consists of an equal number, 15. A teen-age group, which gathers mornings and evenings, usually attracts about 30-35 students. An adult group, mainly composed of ladies, has 6-7 members and meets in the evenings.

MT. ZION SCHOOL--Here again, there are divided sessions according to age groupings, with about 70 youths enrolled in a younger class and teenage class. In addition, Mt. Zion runs an adult program which consists of some 30 students, ~~100~~ 10 in the upper teenage bracket and 20 in the adult grouping. The latter, in the main, are women.

There are special classes in the schools for literacy, separate and divorced from the regular curriculum and scheduling. Mt. Zion, to cite an example, has such training once a week. Mary Sue Gellatly is in charge of this special training.

ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL had closed for the day when our group arrived. We did not have an opportunity to visit TRUE LIGHT SCHOOL.

PAIMER COMMUNITY CENTER--Activities break down into 5 categories. They are the library, literacy training, typing and sewing instruction, a first aid class and sports activities. Joan Opton and Mary Sue Gellatly, in charge of the center, report some 35 youngsters taking part regularly in the 5-7-year age bracket, while between 50 and 100 are in the 8-year old and up (including teenage) sections. Another part of the instruction (which probably falls into the third category of the 5 listed above) includes arts and ~~crafts~~ crafts. This is rated by the staff as especially important because such subjects are not taught at all in the Negro public schools. Nor, of course, is Negro history, an integral part of all courses. The community center, although serving school-like functions, is more of a meeting place and recreational site. This distinguishes the operation from a Freedom School.

MORE GENERAL COMMENTS--It would be presumptuous of us, based on the short observations outlined above, to attempt to make a judgment on the quality of instruction. It does appear, however, that each school has the services of at least one professional teacher (that is, a career teacher), and less experienced summer teachers therefore had experienced guidance available.

Schools, in general, are less structured than public schools of our experience, with great emphasis on personal contact between teacher and student.

2-22-2 school report

This sort of direct relationship, plus the ready response for learning by students, caused one New York City teacher (from Harlem) to comment she was more ~~satisfied~~ satisfied as a teacher in Hattiesburg than in the New York system. She plans to remain in Mississippi. A second teacher, professionally experienced from Harlem, also commented on the fresh and intensive desire to learn demonstrated by students.

There has been some drop-off in attendance at the schools since their inauguration in July. However, with the summer as a ~~temptation~~ bait to depart and considering this is the first year of such schools, the attendance appears to have held up remarkably well.

At one school, Morning Star, we attempted to learn how many of the youngsters in the neighborhood were participating in the school. One student estimated attendance came to about half of the immediate youths in the area. He cited as ~~xxx~~ reasons for failure to attend the necessity for some young people to work during the summer, disinterest and fear.

Facilities in use for instruction ranged from church rooms to the great outdoors with a large tree as a convenient umbrella. The facilities, whatever they were, seemed fresh and were put to good use.

The visiting team consisted of the Rev. Donald Clark, Mrs. Kathleen Henderson and Martin Weinberger.