

Ilene: Here's a rough draft speech outline developed for talks with local PR and news groups. Content varies, depending on audience. Any comments or suggestions from you would be appreciated. The summaries arrived today and will be edited and typed L.A.P. Ditto for clips.

Bob 8/21

Interest in Mississippi first aroused last fall, during the Aaron Henry for Governor campaign, in which 15 Stanford students participated...continued this spring when Bob Moses, the Project leader, visited Stanford, as did Martin Luther King and several field workers in the voter registration campaign waged by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee for the past three years.

Several motives for going to Mississippi:

- First, conversations with Moses and others indicated a real need for professional news skills within the Project
- Second, from the University's standpoint, this experience could contribute to the development of my professional skills...it proved a test of what Ford calls "total performance"
- Third, like most of you, I regarded civil rights as "good"... Any of us can argue about the wisdom of demonstrations in new car show rooms, the shop-ins, or Proposition 13, but when it comes to the right to vote, there can be no question, once such basics as age, literacy and residence requirements are met
- Fourth, one out of every 10 students involved was from Stanford and about a dozen faculty and staff planned to spend their vacation in Mississippi, so I knew I'd be in good company
- Fifth, June was "Hospitality Month" in Mississippi, "The Hospitality State," according to Governor Paul B. Johnson...and as a long-time resident of North Carolina, Florida, and Texas, I thought it might be interesting to do a comparative study of Southern hospitality

If you've had a chance to scan the incident summary sheets, you'll understand why the New York Times headlined one story,

HOSTILITY MEETS  
RIGHTS WORKERS

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MISSISSIPPI HAS HOSPITALITY  
MONTH, BUT NOT FOR THEM

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On March 25, The Jackson Daily News editorialized (when) "these missionaries to Mississippi arrive, they will most certainly be accorded the courtesies befitting their mission...."

When one volunteer arrived in Jackson three months later, he was knocked over from behind and slugged by a member of the local welcoming committee at the railroad station. Three weeks later, he was pistol whipped by a sheriff in the presence of seven state troopers. The following morning, two FBI agents made an appointment with the sheriff, but when they arrived at his office after a 60-mile trip he wasn't there. The hospitality shown this Iowa student earned at least two page-one banners in the Des Moines Register and Tribune.

On arrival in Jackson, a short six hours from here by jet, I picked up The Jackson Daily News. The top right headline read:

**ARMY OCCUPATION  
OF STATE FEARED**

**STENNIS SEES AGITATOR  
INVASION PAVING WAY**

The story below repeated the common fear of Southerners, often echoed by liberal Northern columnists, that the Summer Project was simply a device for provoking the federal occupation of Mississippi.

It quoted Senator Richard Russell of Georgia as saying the expected arrival of 450 unarmed students in the state was "the greatest crusade since the Children's Crusade of the Middle Ages." Unfortunately, no one checked the reaction of Gen. Eisenhower and other veterans of the Crusade in Europe to that description.

Beneath this story, which received secondary play in later editions, was the more ominous headline:

**THREE RIDERS  
ARE 'MISSING'**

This story, of course, dominated national and international news coverage of the state for the next three months. Until the bodies were unearthed by the FBI, however, most white Mississippians--the majority of those interviewed by the press and those who wrote letters to the editor--regarded the disappearance as a hoax.

As Mrs. Ann Sullivan wrote the Jackson Daily News: "The disappearance of these three civil rights workers has been worth a million dollars publicity-wise to civil rights organizations."

Not to be outdone, Joseph Alsop wrote in his "Matter of Fact" column published June 29 by the Washington Post: "It is a dreadful thing to say, but it needs saying. The organizers who sent these young people into Mississippi must have wanted, even hoped for, martyrs. And now, alas, they have got what they wanted." Unfortunately, Mr. Alsop never had a chance to see or feel the reaction of all those involved in the Project to this event.

The following morning, a headline writer for the Rutland, Vermont, Herald put the facts in better--though biased--perspective: "No Sign Yet of Trio Lost/Amid Mississippi Savages." The AP story which followed failed to make any mention of the Choctaw Indians who frequent the Philadelphia area.

An hour after I walked into the Office, we were in the midst of the first--and biggest--of about 25 news conferences held in the ensuing four weeks. The national and international press descended on the state in droves: 83 newsmen were registered in a single motel outside Meridian one night.

The size and mobility of the press corps presented some unusual problems in making sure everyone was covered on major news developments. It was reduced to manageable proportions 1) by covering the wires, the nets, and key reporters at each motel on an informal "pool" basis, 2) by keeping track of who was where as best we could, and 3) by having a communications staff person on hand at Jackson 24 hours a day to handle press visitors and inquiries, as well as process information received from the field.

The facts flooded in, wave after wave to our Jackson center from a network of 20 Project offices throughout the state. Within four weeks, there were three missing rights workers, two grisly hit-and-run deaths, two half bodies found in the Mississippi River, one typical highway patrol killing, at least six major beatings, five home and business bombings, eleven church burnings and attempted arsons, over 200 arrests of civil rights workers, and seven arrests (six by the FBI) of local whites accused of violent acts against us. We kept score, so to speak, on a pool basis with Claude Sitton of the New York Times, one of the best straight news reporters in the South.

Somehow, half a dozen of us managed to keep our heads above water. Bob Weil, a SNCC staffer, was in charge of our section. Bill Light, a San Francisco resident who went to Stanford, was second in-command. Margaret Rose, a Stanford graduate student volunteer, was a steady source of help to everyone. Ilene Strelitz, last year's editor of The Stanford Daily and another volunteer, came down to serve as my replacement. She was one of three or four people responsible for getting so many individuals from her alma mater involved in the Project. Emmy Schraeder, Francis Mitchell, Mary King, and several other SNCC staffers in Atlanta and Greenwood rounded out the group.

In all, more than 70 Californians participated in the Project. Perhaps this explains why we saw more Congressmen than reporters from the Bay Area there. But we have no complaints about the coverage given Mississippi by local press, radio, and TV--thanks in large part to Business Wire and--in Lorry's absence on Sunday and the late evening hours--to the willingness of city editors to accept collect calls from Never, Never Land. (Mississippi alone among the 50 states has yet to integrate a single public school classroom below the college level. It will do so this fall).

Whenever the facts were at flood tide, we got rumors. The most persistent of these was that the three workers had been seen alive several days after they were reported missing. Thus on June 25, AP carried a story from Baton Rouge, Louisiana saying a man who looked like Goodman had been seen boarding a bus there. UPI got more attention with a bulletin from Montgomery, Ala., quoting Highway Patrol chief Al Lingo as saying several persons in Marion, Alabama had seen the three. Within three minutes, we told both UPI and AP we were absolutely certain that the three would have contacted us immediately if they had any opportunity to do so. UPI followed with a list of seven witnesses from Lingo. ABC ran an immediate check. It could not locate six, but the seventh--the owner of the drive-in where the three supposedly were seen--said flatly of Lingo's story, "It's a lie." This came in time for the evening network newscasts (CBS used it and credited "another network"), but Lingo's claim got wide coverage in the PM papers.

This myth was diligently encouraged by Governor Johnson. He was quoted several times as saying the three could be anywhere--"even in Cuba." Just before slamming the door of his office in the face of Mrs. Schwerner, he smilingly told reporters, "Only Gov. Wallace and I know where they are."

In a similar vein, another high state official told Jim Van Sickle of WNEW he hoped that some of the parents of summer volunteers would come to the state just to "make sure" their youngsters "weren't living in

brothels." WNEW never used that, so far as I know, and it never hit the wires. As it happened, quite by coincidence, we had mothers in the state who knew the facts--and were standing by to reply.

Governor Johnson probably never realized it, but his comments also provided a fairly constant source of amusement to us. On July 2, for example, he told a press conference that the summer volunteers weren't much good..."some of them are even idealists." He characterized the National Council of Churches as an extremist group and said "if any blood is shed in this state, it will be on their hands." His comment on enactment of the new Civil Rights Bill was that "this comes at a very bad time...of course, from our standpoint, any time would be a bad time."

Veteran local political reporters will tell you that Johnson is a moderate--by Mississippi standards.

Turning serious, the governor also charged there were at least 10 communists in the Summer Project. When pressed for names, he provided three. None were associated with the Project in any way, as reporters discovered very promptly by checking a complete list of volunteers and staffers. And, to the press's credit, not one paper, wire service, or radio station carried either the claim or the refutation. To most white Mississippians, however, any white civil rights worker is practically a communist by definition. We got lots of telephone reminders of this, an average of 10 or 12 calls a night--plus death threats, harassment from a phone operator or two (which ended after stiff complaints to the company), and the uneasy knowledge that our phone lines were constantly tapped.

Our rumor problems were by no means confined to the South, however. One night we were bombarded by about a dozen calls from the UN press corps in New York. Mrs. Raphael Hendrix, a self-described "COFO official," had wired all the Asian and African delegations asking that the U.N. send troops into Mississippi to ensure voting rights and suggesting that the 13 Southern states be turned into U.N. trusteeships. These wild ideas rapidly restored our sense of humor, even though they neatly reinforced some of the myths perpetrated by our opposition. Of course, Mrs. Hendrix was in no way connected with the Project--in fact, no one knew where she lived beyond the fact that the telegrams came from New York. So the press took a pass on that one.

On at least three occasions, however, the press has not overlooked the comments of one of our finest local comedians, Dick Gregory. And none of these did the civil rights cause much good. He flew into Jackson from Russia early one morning, spending a few hours in our office and a cafe down the street before moving on to Meridian for a press conference. He returned quite quickly to San Francisco, where he told the press that he had given National CORE Director James Farmer some "hot news" which might enable the FBI to break the Philadelphia case. We got the calls, contacted Farmer immediately, and learned that this was simply one more lead, which Farmer himself did not regard as especially hot.

After failing to show up for a scheduled Mississippi benefit program at Stanford, caused by a misunderstanding, Gregory predicted at least 75 students would die in the Summer Project. Finally, when the bodies of the three civil rights workers were found, The New York Times devoted a full column to refuting his claims

that a letter he'd given the FBI helped break the case.

Every one of us in the Summer Project appreciates the financial support given us by Mr. Gregory and others. And I, for one, greatly enjoy the light touch he gives the news in his performances and share his belief that civil rights workers need to keep their wits about them. Without a sense of humor, no one working in Mississippi on civil rights can long retain his sanity. But when it comes to reporting facts or making predictions, no place demands a serious, straightforward approach more than Mississippi.

Where else in America could you consistently experience these contradictions:

1. Get a phone call from an eyewitness that a building was on fire--and 20 minutes later have the fire department say the only fire in town was a small brush blaze? (Arsonists had firebombed a hall used for voter registration rallies.)

2. Almost routinely receive denials from local jailers and sheriffs that named individuals (all civil rights workers) were being held or had been arrested--hours after they were questioned or put behind bars?

3. Have law enforcement officers report two students had been held in "protective custody"--as The Chron put it--and later learn that the students 1) were taken to jail at 85 m.p.h. by police without lights or sirens, at night; 2) were put in both Negro and white cells, where police urged the prisoners to beat them up, and 3) were told--falsely--that their leader had been cut in half (a favorite Mississippi means of human disposal) and a colleague raped by a Negro.

Where civil rights workers are involved, the only safe way to establish a fact in Mississippi is to dispatch four lawyers and reporters to the scene. That way you can always have a witness whenever the sheriff makes a statement--and you can have two men waiting to make sure those getting the facts aren't jailed themselves.

The Summer Project showed this approach works very effectively. It is one of the reasons why we were very much aware of the fact that, for every four summer volunteers, there was one out-of-state lawyer, one law student, and one newsman in Mississippi. In addition, there were two more state highway patrolmen in training, one additional FBI agent assigned to the state, about four search-weary sailors, a trained civil rights worker, a minister, a doctor--and about eight worried parents back home.

All this personal support helped overcome such physical difficulties as a phone systems with six widely scattered lines which could be used only 1) for incoming, 2) for outgoing, or 3) for local calls--a single electric typewriter and about four workable manual models for a group which grew as large as 40 at times--a single Thermofax and a well worn mimeograph in the duplicating department...and office temperatures in the high 90s day in, day out, until one volunteer's parents put up \$200 and we had a local Negro firm repair the air conditioning.

Sometimes as much as 36 hours would elapse before someone would take the mail to the post office... but then, we had only two cars and made only two or three news mailings in the entire month. The administrative task, in short, was reducing chaos to disorder. Whatever the small frustrations, it was reassuring to feel, as one small sign put it: "No one would dare bomb this office and end all this confusion."

Some of the less tangible problems included proper handling of news credits--with so many different organizations involved...having to keep two other offices (in Atlanta and Greenwood) fully informed on all major developments, trying to overcome some of the hostile attitudes toward the press and the FBI felt by many of the civil rights field workers, who had dealt for years only with Southern newsmen and local resi-

dent FBI agents...and trying somehow to mesh a downward-oriented organization in which the field workers are the only real heroes with an upward-oriented national news stereotype. When it comes to coverage, a Roy Wilkins or a Martin Luther King goes far further than the SNCC and CORE men in blue jeans who are the heart of the Mississippi Negro's struggle for justice.

It would have been easy---and futile---to argue over these news stereotypes. Instead, we tried to work within them---and to explain their rationale to leaders of the Summer Project. Whenever we wrote stories, we tried to follow wire service style---there was no time for features. Whenever we worked with the networks, which was every day and every night, we tried to think first in their terms, second in ours.

Every PR man has two loyalties: one to his organization, the other to the press. Mississippi powerfully confirmed my long established prejudice that the ultimate success of any information program demands that we look at our organization first and foremost the way a straight reporter would. We should not waste time telling newsmen how hard it is to get stories cleared. We should make every effort to break down the barriers to free communication within our organization.

On the Summer Project as at Stanford, we treated all newsmen on an equal basis. We gave the Birmingham News and the Jackson papers the same access to our office as The New York Times. They did not choose to use our services as much, but the Jackson papers particularly did an impressive job of reporting our side of the news, almost entirely through wire service accounts.

Several of the Southern reporters seemed genuinely surprised and appreciative of this equal treatment. This was another very small example of how professionals working together can help reduce stereotypes.

All was not sweetness and light, of course: the Jackson papers had several slanted stories written by staffers (even though the slants were understandable to anyone who has worked in a city room), ran their quota of inflammatory headlines (integration was almost always referred to as "mixing"), and had plenty of prejudiced editorial columns, which is their privilege. But there was no local shortage of high quality wire service coverage of civil rights for those who were interested.

Soon after the Project started, both AP and UPI manned their Jackson offices round the clock. Both did an aggressive job of news coverage within the limits imposed 1) by available manpower, 2) by reliance on local stringers and client papers, 3) by facts available from local law enforcement officers, and 4) by phone service, which is practically unknown in several rural areas of the state---those in which terrorist activities are most widespread.

The southwest corner of the state is notorious in this respect. More than a week elapsed between the time a Negro church was burned to the ground there and news of the event reached Jackson, for example. Our outposts there were understandably few and far between.

In the same portion of the state, most of us were startled to learn, a total of 728 students were summarily expelled from Alcorn A&M College in mid-April. This is more than half the total enrollment of the nation's first land grant college. Alcorn is an all <sup>state-supported</sup> Negro college with a Negro president. Like all Negro colleges in Mississippi it is completely under the thumb of the state. After staging a completely non-violent protest against the usual range of spring gripes---social hours, grading systems, and the like---the 700 plus students were taken off campus by the busload, with 75 state troopers as escorts. News interest in the incident stemmed from the fact that one of the half-bodies found in the Mississippi River was identified as a former Alcorn student who had been involved in the incident. The original event occurred while national

press interest was focused on the Beckwith trial for Medgar Evers murder in Jackson.

By the time the two-half bodies were found by the FBI, the center of national news interest had moved from Jackson to San Francisco. But Jackson TV stations did not bury the local story. In the middle of the Republican convention, one interrupted with a bulletin: the Mississippi flag appeared on screen with the words, "Let's Talk Mississippi" proudly displayed; the announcer said simply, "The two half-bodies found in the Mississippi River are not those of the three missing civil rights workers, state officials reported today." Back to the convention.

For several hours, we were very much involved in checking the identification, for some items found on the first body seemed to correspond quite closely with one of the missing three. Fortunately, we clamped a very tight lid on any comment beyond "we're checking on it" until the facts were absolutely clear. We were very glad we waited.

Given the enormous difficulty of establishing the facts, we took great care to attach different levels of reliability to all information given the press. Thus, one evening, we said we had dispatched a team of four lawyers to check several disturbing reports received from Moss Point. This was a fact, enough of a "peg" for the wire services to use. The reports we had received were 1) that two students had been arrested---a fact confirmed to us by a sheriff's deputy, but denied to AP by the sheriff himself a few minutes later; 2) that a Knights of Pythias Hall had been firebombed, a report received from an eyewitness, denied by the local fire department, then finally confirmed by the attorneys; 3) that two Negro youths had been arrested for whistling at a white woman, a fact confirmed by our team, who were falsely told by the sheriff that the Negroes had been released on bond; and 4) that two Negro youngsters who had eaten candy thrown from a white person's car had been seriously poisoned, which was nothing more than a rumor.

All this happened in one Mississippi community in one night. By attaching different levels of reliability for each report, we established a reputation for credibility with newsmen. By calling all over the country, we also managed to get 15 reporters and cameramen at the jail the next morning to interview the students after their release.

Establishing a reputation for reliability, keeping stories short, simple and straight, and working within news stereotypes were three key working hypotheses which met the test of Mississippi. The fourth was keeping news confidences: when the two half-bodies were found, for example, we received "exclusive" information from four separate sources, each of whom specified it was not to be shared with others. This was not the news custom in Mississippi, where most facts were pooled. But the requests were scrupulously observed.

These simple guidelines, plus lots of plain hard work, achieved very satisfactory results. We had no budget for a clipping service, and no set to monitor TV (except for two network specials). But the timing and the flow of news events helped make millions of Americans at least dimly aware of existing conditions within Mississippi for a few days. In addition, thousands of individuals like you will hear more detailed accounts as the volunteers return home across the country.

Far more important than the publicity, however, have been the positive achievements of the Project's programs:

- \* For the first time, hundreds of Mississippi Negroes have seen at least a few whites who do not share the segregationist views of those within the state. The myth that Mississippi can remain a totally closed society has been shattered forever.
- \* For the first time, thousands of young Negro children have attended schools which do not

indoctrinate them with racial inferiority. They have heard adults talk proudly about the achievements of their ancestors, and realistically the problems of being a Negro in Mississippi. Visiting musical and theatrical groups have opened new creative horizons to those with talents in these fields.

- \* For the first time, scores of Mississippi whites have encountered other whites in the same profession who do not share their racial views. Local lawmen have found themselves systematically confronted with attorneys for the accused, with FBI agents where federal laws may have been broken. If it can be sustained, this kind of personal confrontation will do far more to change the climate of opinion than any number of news articles or TV shows.

No matter what our prejudices, all of us tend to think in stereotypes. We are particularly prone to regard our opponents as more monolithic and powerful than they really are. Most of us looked at the Soviets this way in the mid-50s, and many will find it easy to regard Mississippi in similar fashion today.

Yet there are communities within Mississippi, like Greenville, which probably can be described as normal by most American standards, even when it comes to civil rights. And there certainly are more whites who are moderates or even civil rights sympathizers than such outspoken individuals as James Silver, P.D. East, the Hodding Carters.

No one hears much about them, because they are a small minority. But the presence of other whites and---even more important---appropriate federal laws, federally enforced, can amplify their voice within the state.

Contrary to the claims of die-hard Southern Congressmen, passage of the new Civil Rights Bill did not trigger widespread bloodshed. A few unprofitable restaurants and hotels used its enactment as an excuse to close, and a few others fought it in the courts. But in Jackson, the headquarters city of the White Citizens Council, both the mayor and the Chamber of Commerce urged compliance with the new law. Restaurant men asked public "patience and understanding" in paid advertisements. Citizens backed the mayor in signed letters to the editor and Thompson told the press 85 per cent of his mail backed his position.

More recently, wives of prominent citizens have formed a statewide citizens committee to support public education. Their action followed the first federal court orders for public-school integration in Jackson and three counties. And, in at least one instance, whites offered to rebuild a Negro church destroyed by arson.

It is all too easy to overstate the progress made by Mississippi moderates, however. Drew Pearson, another Northern liberal columnist, did this in suggesting that the Summer Project deliberately slacken its pace to give "responsible" Southern leadership a chance to show what it can do. Unfortunately, this kind of leadership usually emerges only under duress in Mississippi. This certainly was the case with Mayor Thompson in Jackson. In calling for compliance with the new Civil Rights Bill, he noted that federal agents with "unlimited" money and manpower were present to insure its enforcement.

To suggest, as Pearson did, that students should be sent to Mississippi only if this moderate leadership failed---and the situation became far worse---is ludicrous. In like fashion, it is difficult to fathom why three out of four of those polled in a national survey by Lou Harris favored use of federal troops in Mississippi, "if violence breaks out," but opposed far less drastic action by private individuals, 2-to-1. Perhaps these examples illustrate the shortcomings of stereotypes in solving complex problems.

While there have been changes in Mississippi this summer, 1,000 volunteers and professionals have not made the state safe for democracy. Far from it. This ultimately will be the task of a new native generation, both black and white.

But there is hope that the rate of change in Mississippi may slowly accelerate.

Forty per cent of those now involved in the Summer Project will stay there--200 students have decided to stay there this fall and winter--after September 1 termination date. And in my opinion Mississippi whites probably can anticipate a two or three-fold increase in tourists with an established interest in civil rights next year.

But it remains to be seen whether or not our crisis-oriented society can provide the sustained personal commitment, political interest, and financial support which any long range remedy for Mississippi's sickness will require. In this respect, the challenge of Jackson and McComb differs little from the challenge of Moscow and Peking. Neither has any cheap, quick, easy solution. In both, a direct military confrontation may prove necessary, at times, but non-violent means may prove more productive in securing democratic ends over the long run.

The entry of the Citizens Council movement into California and the reception accorded African students in the Soviet Union make it quite clear that the white man's malaise is by no means limited to a single state or political philosophy. It is a near universal affliction.

The sooner we diagnose our cancer of the conscience and cleanse the core of our infection, the more rapid and less painful our recovery will be. Thank you.