

MEMORANDUM

18 March 1965

TO : Executive Committee
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

FROM : Sanford R. Leigh
Mississippi 5th District Director

SUBJ : Final Fifth District Project Report

Mississippi's 5th District will provide the new District Director with a challenge to his courage, tenacity, and imagination. The areas in which projects have been initiated are fairly stable with such exceptions as will be noted below. To a certain degree most of the communities are organized--not in the sense we discuss in our workshops, but along lines peculiar to the area in question.

During last summer's Freedom Registration campaign, and during last fall's Freedom Vote, nearly all of the 5th District was covered. The lack of personnel resource and the heavy work loads in established project areas precluded initiating additional areas in which to work. The political boundaries of the 5th District are the Central and Southeastern counties. The areas are chiefly rural with the exception of the Gulf Coast cities. Hattiesburg and Laurel--billed as sister cities--are industrial cities in the northern section of the 5th. In the rural areas the Negro population is low. The white majority rule with an iron fist, thus making fear of white persecution a formidable obstacle to overcome. A Negro from one of these areas informed me that because there is no safety in numbers, no protective anonymity, he's not about to stick out his neck. Persons are needed to go and live in each of these counties to work with these people. It will be a slow, dangerous, and arduous task, to say the least. None of the towns in any of these rural counties have a population exceeding 20,000 - if that much - and the new worker will stand out like a wart on a bald head.

In the coastal cities where tourism and some manufacturing are the chief industries there is some pretension to liberalism. However, this pretension is simply veneer. The Southern Way of Life, complete with all its odious features is still implacably enforced with all of the sophistication of the North, and the characteristic brutality of the South. School desegregation, public accommodation, voter registration, and job opportunities are moving along with the furious progress of a snail. The "progress" is despite the ballyhoo and not because of it. The income of the Negro on the Coast is considerably higher than elsewhere in the State. He is not quite as hungry as his brothers in the Delta or in the rural areas. With few exceptions he sees no need for political activity. Such political activity (if it can be called such) as exists is dominated by Toms who are protected, encouraged, and used by the Local Machine. Needless to say, these Toms have no voice in politics. Their chief function is discouraging independent social and political thought and action. Such organization and activity as are presently taking place are doing so under formidable odds. But there is still hope.

Probably the best organized area is Forrest County, of which Hattiesburg is the County Seat. This is perhaps SNCC has been actively working in this area since 1961 and the people there have had a steady diet of Freedom. Laurel (Jones County) is in very much the same boat as the coastal cities of Gulfport, Biloxi, Moss Point, and Pascagoula. Until last summer, the Negroes were deluded by that area's propagandists. Now, because of their efforts to organize themselves along new political and social lines, they are being bruised by the iron fist of white oppression which had hitherto been concealed by the velvet glove of sweet talk. The reaction of the Negro community to this new turn of events has been mixed. The established Negro leadership has reacted predictably negative. They have expressed concern lest change does not proceed

with caution and with due regard to form. As usual, the hope is to be found in the youth, who can be expected to prod their recalcitrant elders into dynamic action. (Not so dynamic as we view it, but certainly by their standards.) With this general outline in mind, let us move to the activities of specific project areas.

1. BILOXI

All that has been stated with regard to the political and social climate on the Gulf Coast applies here. The resort hotels, their subsidiary service companies, and Keesler Air Force Base, provide the bulk of employment for Negroes, in menial positions, of course. Very few of the small businesses are owned and operated by Negroes except several saloons. The chief source of wealth in the Negro community consists of a few Negroes with extensive holdings in real property.

A central authoritative figure here is Dr. Gilbert Mason. This physician is president of the NAACP chapter in Biloxi. He is opposed to progress or action by any faction he cannot lead. Last summer Mason was quoted as saying in an NAA meeting that if it were left to him he would see to it that SNCC and/or COFO (which he thinks are one and the same) were stamped out. His most conspicuous achievement was leading a wade-in on the Biloxi beaches back in 1961. Since that single bout he has been content to rest on his laurels. Mason enjoys a reputation for leadership in the community and his influence is seriously regarded.

The aforementioned landlords have formed an alliance of sorts with Dr. Mason and some of the conservative clergy of Biloxi. Together they exert their influence in the Negro community towards non-cooperation in any of SNCC's programs. This established leadership has been fought by the SNCC led COFO staff--not by engaging in popularity contests, but by attempting to organize people around issues important to themselves. The FDP, since last summer, is gaining in its following, but this has been slow. There are a few hard-core workers, local people, who can be depended upon to drum up enthusiasm for the FDP, and so in this area I see at the present some limited progress.

The COFO Community Center serves as a focus for all political activity for Biloxi's FDP. It is a large old building in which the downstairs has been remodeled by the COFO staff. It was rented last fall on an annual basis from the present owners, the Oddfellows. In the building there is a library of about 12,000 volumes; a food and clothing distribution room; 2 sleeping quarters; an office; and a hall, accommodating approximately 200 persons, which is used for staff and FDP meetings, workshops, and the like. The facilities of this center are limited in use partly because remodeling is incomplete, and partly because of lack of staff inspired community participation. The staff has also done some limited public accommodations testing.

PERSONNEL

Dickie F. Flowers
Barry Clemson
Bennie Jackson
Ernest Jackson
Charles Johnson
Michael Bruland
Arthur L. Jacobs
Curtis Styles

Project Director (SNCC)
Ass't Project Director (Volunteer)
Community Center (CC*) (SNCC)
VR/CC/FDP (L/P)
VR/CC/FDP (L/P)
VR/FDP/Library (Volunteer)
(VR/FDP/MSU (L/P)
VR/FDP/MSU (L/P)

* Abbreviations: VR: Voter Registration; CC: Community Centers, L/P: Local People; FDP: Freedom Democratic Party; MSU: Mississippi Student Union. Volunteers are persons not on SNCC staff who have come down from the North.

BILOXI PROJECTED MONTHLY BUDGET

Rent (1 year paid - ends Fall '65)	
Telephone	\$ 17.00
Office supplies	40.00
Utilities (gas-water-lites)	30.00
Transportation (gas, repairs)	50.00
Approximate total:	\$137.00

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2. GULFPORT

Gulfport is probably the weakest link in the chain of the 5th District. Lack of experienced staff, hard-core conservative (Tom?) leadership, and inappropriate physical facilities from which to operate contribute to the ineffectiveness of this project. In addition to working in the restaurant/hotel and service firms, there is dock work for the man. They belong to the union which was on strike recently. (Their spokesman is one of the Toms highly regarded by the people downtown. And he can be depended upon to go along with whatever union officials say. He is influential because of his position, in getting the workers to go along with him.) There is a movement afoot among the maids to organize themselves into a union. FDP activity is sparsely attended, and here we have almost a duplicate of the Biloxi situation as regards NAA-SNCC-COFO relations. Dr. Felix Dunn, president of the Gulfport NAA, at one time is anti-FDP-SNCC-COFO, at other times indifferent, and still other times inexplicably pro. Since the people in general can't understand his position they are usually noncommittal and hesitate to participate in any activities. (Dunn's also allied with the Union Tom and the reverend clergy, who are at least consistent in their anti stance.) It's difficult to reach a workable understanding with Dr. Dunn because of this vacillation. I stress Dunn because of the influence he wields as a "responsible" leader. As examples: when it became known that Dunn put up the money as a loan for Mrs. Gray's campaign fee (\$300 last April), interest in her campaign heightened and people actually campaigned for her. Harrison County carried the largest Negro vote in the state in the regular June 2 Primary for her. When Dunn spoke out against having a summer project in Gulfport, saying "We can handle our own problems, we don't need 'beatniks' and other white outsiders" and so on, people generally went along with that suggestion. Consequently, it was only with a lot of hard work that advances in Gulfport were made, as actually happened.

Right now I can't say that too much of significance is going on there. Voter Registration efforts are still being made. Some attempt at trying to teach Freedom School is being made with limited results insofar as attendance and participation is concerned. FDP activity is supported by the faithful few who can be depended upon to show up at all meetings, whether district, state, or local. They're very strong people and have an optimism I cannot help but admire. Some of the staff are working in a ghetto called "Sewer City" which is an outlying district of Gulfport. It is an area that could very well qualify for a "Poverty Program" if the need were put to the government. The workers are trying to get the people in Sewer City to put both Johnsons to the test. There are no jobs available, and such jobs as are pay little or next to nothing. Housing is inadequate. Schools are far off. No coverage by the fire department. A fire occurs in one house and it's very likely that neighboring houses will go up also. This has happened one time this year and several times last year. However, the people are afraid to protest, and they bemoan their lot rather than do anything about it. From what I can understand, there might be some action coming out of this area. Right now, the people in Sewer City can't see the relevance of political action, but as they are being made to see the light, I think they'll move.

GULFPORT PERSONNEL

Charles McKeller	Project Director (SNCC)
Jack McGleson	Ass't Project Director (Volunteer)
John Else	VR-FDP-Ministers' work (Disciples of Christ)
Ann Else	CC - Freedom School (Volunteer)
Henry Aldren	N. Gulfport FDP (Volunteer)
David Edmondson	same as above -----
John Campbell	same as above (L/P)
Kenneth Dollarhide	Central Gulfport CC (Volunteer)
Eleanor Aragon	same as above & office (Volunteer)
Donna Wesley	same as above (Volunteer)
Charles Wheeler	Sewer City (SNCC)
Sam Walker	same as above (Volunteer)

N.B. Most of the personnel here with the exception of the project director, John & Ann Else, and the local people, are new. This may be the cause of some of the confusion that reigns, since they have their own ideas to what should be done and how. Since they are amenable to suggestion, a few workshops wouldn't hurt.

PROJECTED MONTHLY BUDGET

Rent	\$ 35.00
Utilities	30.00
Office supplies	40.00
Telephone	17.00
Transportation (gas, repairs)	<u>50.00</u>
Approximate total	\$172.00

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3. HATTIESBURG

Hattiesburg is an industrial city, nicknamed the "Hub City" and a transportation center for the Southeast. Four major arterial highways pass through and around H'burg; and 4 major railroads have terminals. However, with increasing use of air transport, freight and passenger, most of the subsidiary businesses dependent upon and incidental to rail and truck transportation have gone out of business. This has left H'burg an employment problem: unemployment and underemployment. And of course, Negroes are affected the most by this change. The Chamber of Commerce has been trying to attract new business to H'burg. Through repeated statements in the news media they have called upon the white citizenry of H'burg to be "law abiding" and put up with whatever voter registration activities as are going on in the Negro community. They are afraid of adverse publicity and for this reason they have sat down on the police to the extent that the police don't harass the Movement workers as much as they used to. This is not to say that all is hunky-dunky. Not by a long shot. Because the cops are still there. They're using a new tactic: they hardly bother the VR workers except for the usual traffic tickets for imaginary infractions of traffic laws. What they do now is to direct most of the violence and terror against people who are known not to have anything to do with the Movement. This is supposed to keep those who aren't with us from joining us. So far, this has had the opposite of the desired effect.

The 3 largest manufacturing plants are not locally owned. Hiring practices echo those of the north during the 30s up through early post WW2. Negroes are hired in somewhat proportionate numbers (actually they make up little better than 1/5 of the labor force of these 3 companies) but only, again, in menial capacities. (An interesting dir-

ective came from the parent firm of Hercules Mfg. Co., in Delaware last year when SNCC heightened its voter registration drive: "Do not fire Negroes who have attempted to register to vote. BUT, discourage any political activities - i.e. involvement with civil rights groups.") And this has been their policy up to now.

As I mentioned earlier in this report, I think the best organized area in the 5th is the Hattiesburg project. Right now, local people are increasingly taking over the functions of the project. Examples: The Palmers Crossing Community Center and the Dewey Street CC are being run by the local people. In Palmers, a committee of women has been set up to take care of running activities in the center, from taking charge of the Day Care activities for pre-school age children to chaperoning the teen Friday night dances at the Center. They have assessed dues for mothers in the community 10¢ a week to cover such expenses as telephone and utilities. And they plan other fund raising activities to cover costs of things they see are needed for the center. In the Dewey Street Center, one lady who is very active in the Movement, has organized her ladies into fund raising efforts to cover the cost of having the electricity turned on. Classes are being planned for the Center as well as Precinct Workshops. The youth use the place after school right now until dark for recreational purposes. (Until the building inspector can give the ok there can be no electricity in that building. The lights were turned off last December as a result of his "inspection.") Forrest County FDP has their own committee which operates workshops, holds meetings, gets out publicity, and so on, without too much assistance from the COFO staff. The Welfare and Relief Committee manages their own program of distribution and canvassing. It is run entirely by the people of Hattiesburg. (An interesting sidelight: Bob Beech, who's in charge of the NCC's Delta Ministry, was recently asked to forego making any suggestions (stop meddling!) in committee meetings. These activities take place in numbers. There are different people working on different programs within the project. Their work sometimes overlaps with the work of other people. Sometimes some of these conflicts resolve themselves quickly, other times, it takes great tact and diplomacy to get some of the conflicts resolved. All in all, it's almost ideal.

PERSONNEL

C. Douglas Smith	Project Director (SNCC)
Mrs. Peggy Jean Connor	Bookkeeper/Treasurer, FDP (L/P)
Mary Louise Crosby	CC - VR (SNCC)
Emma Jean Wilburn	CC (SNCC)
Sherrie Ann Maxie	VR - FDP (SNCC)
Phyllis Cunningham	Public Health Nursing, VR, (SNCC)
Cornelia Mack	Literacy Training (SNCC)

PROJECT MONTHLY BUDGET

RENTS: Palmers Crossing CC	Paid through December 65
Dewey Street CC	Free
Library 507½ Mobile St.	\$20/mo. paid quarterly
Office 507 Mobile St.	\$50/mo. paid semi annually
UTILITIES ON 4 INSTALLATIONS:	
Gas	\$ 56.00
Electricity	45.00
Water	10.00
(2) telephones	34.00
Supplies	80.00
Petty cash	100.00
Automobiles	100.00
APPROXIMATE TOTAL:	\$425.00

4. LAUREL

What has been said about Laurel at the beginning of this paper sums up the situation there. The Negro leadership still resists change as does the white power structure. Much has been done and is being done to prevent this. Despite these obstacles the community is gradually being awakened. The youth are being organized under the banner of MSU. As with the adults there are a few hard-core workers in the MSU who are leading the way. A sort of coalition of MSU, COFO, and FDP exists as a loose decision making body. The Laurel project has expanded into other communities, notably: Mt. Olive, Ellisville, Sandersville, Soso, Overt, and Dacetown. No particular problems have been met while working in these communities yet, possibly because groups going into them haven't been integrated. The Project Director expects fireworks to begin as soon as their working becomes common knowledge in these areas.

In spite of the fire which destroyed one of the buildings operated by the Laurel project, there is still activity in Freedom Schools, MSU, FDP and general VR work. The program for the abovementioned outlying communities is VR. In Laurel itself, the work being done is the FS, MSU organizing, FDP, which is planning workshops for that area; also VR instruction.

PERSONNEL

Gwen Robinson	Project Director (SNCC)
Ben Hertfield	VR Director (L/P)
Ulysses Everett	VR-FDP (L/P)
John Hardy	VR-MSU-FDP (SNCC)
Moses Lee Jackson	VR (L/P)
James Gavin Williams	VR (L/P)
Marian Davison	Communications, Library, FS (Volunteer)
Patricia McCauley	Federal Programs, MSU, VR (Volunteer)
Peter Nemenyi	FS & VR (Part Time Volunteer)

PROJECTED MONTHLY BUDGET (Temporary until they move)

Rent	\$ 40.00
Gas, Lites, water	43.50
Automobiles	100.00
Telephone	11.75
Office Supplies (including money for printing bi-weekly newspaper)	<u>106.00</u>
APPROXIMATE TOTAL	\$301.25

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5. MOSS POINT - PASCAGOULA

Next to Hattiesburg, perhaps the best organized area is the Moss Point-Pascagoula section. This has been long in coming, and although I'm enthusiastic, frankness compels me to admit that this organization, although strong at the present time, can falter and perhaps die out. Moss Point is presently organized around a school boycott sponsored by mothers of school children. They are trying to spread the boycott over to Pascagoula. Right now it's in the air. The ring leaders of this boycott happens to be one of the officers of the FDP and has taken advantage of this boycott to interest more people in the FDP program. The turnout at the FDP county meeting was very good, close to 200, considering a few weeks before there weren't quite 30. And people were talking, not only about the boycott, but about other things of interest to them in

their community. As can be expected, the Old Guard has been in there pitching. The ex-president of the NAA (he was ousted in favor of a man who participated in many of the activities of COFO and the FDP), making a re-bid for influence by going around to houses at 6 a.m. telling people to send their children to school---that they would ruin their children's educational future if they didn't and so on---was upset when he was ignored and the boycott grew larger every day. Close to a thousand children were out on Friday according to the report that was made to the project director. The mothers are manning the picket line, with good discipline. They are able to be in touch with the press and radio in case of any developments like arrests and/or violence, and they have the phone numbers of the Atlanta and Jackson offices to report same. They are also putting out leaflets informing other mothers about the boycott and its rationale; and they are telephoning and canvassing personally for this cause.

As far as the employment situation is concerned in this area, there are several large manufacturing firms there: Continental Can Co., Ingalls Shipyards, a large lumber mill, and of course, the tourist traps. The unions, such as they are, are corrupt. Some of the union members are planning to bring suit against not only the unions, but against some of the employing companies. They plan to sue through the Employment Title of the 64 Civil Rights Act soon as it goes into effect this summer.

Voter registration is becoming increasingly difficult. At one time before VR campaigns were waged, there was little resistance to prospective Negro registrants. Now, however, the political structure is singing a different tune. Negroes are not being registered as freely as before. FDP is planning some direct action to bring this to the attention of the public.

PERSONNEL

Georgia Martin	Project Director (SNCC)
Charles Glenn	VR and Community Relations (SNCC)
Everett McKeller	VR (L/P)
Linda Wilson	VR (L/P)
James Bass	VR (L/P)
John Henry Davis	VR (L/P)
Nancy Sours	VR-Communications (Volunteer)
Mary Larson	VR-FS-MSU (Volunteer)
Steve Findley	Auto Mechanic for 5th District (Volunteer)

MONTHLY PROJECTED BUDGET

Rent	\$ 35.00
Utilities	40.00
Telephone	17.00
Office Supplies	40.00
Automobiles (gas, etc.)	<u>50.00</u>

APPROXIMATE TOTAL	\$182.00
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N.B. There is an immediate need for some bond money to be paid back which was borrowed by the project last month in order to get 3 local workers out of jail. The amount is \$185. One paid his way out. The others had to borrow through the project director who borrowed in the community. This was borrowed with the understanding it would be repaid. The project director informed me that the man was on her back for repayment. Could this money be sent to Georgia Martin? She will repay him and send you receipts. Also, Steve Findley fixes cars, not only for the 5th District, but for the rest of the state. He ought to have expense money for parts, tools and the like. Can this be fixed up?

FUTURE PLANS FOR THE DISTRICT

There is a need to go into several areas of the 5th. Many on staff are ready to do so. What I see is the need to go into the "Iron Triangle": Picayune, Poplarville (both Pearl River County), and Wiggins (Stone County), all at the same time. The reason for this being that hitting both towns in the one county and Wiggins in the neighboring county will split the forces of the cops in that area. West of Pearl River is Louisiana, north is Lamar and Forrest (the former will be having its problems soon and Forrest is already busy), and east is Stone. Hancock County will be worked out of Gulfport, and so on. There are many contacts in these areas just begging for someone to come in and start working. Doug Smith has over 100 contacts up in Jeff Davis County and would like to expand into Lamar and Marion Counties as well. Gwen Robinson has some contacts in neighboring counties. In the southeast corner of the 5th, Green and George Counties, there are people also waiting for something to happen. (I hope it's not Godot.)

I have been talking to some of the local people in the already established projects about forming a 5th District Executive Committee which would be responsible for making decisions regarding programs and areas to expand, etc., in the 5th. They were to have talked to me at the COFO meeting in Jackson but the Selma thing came up and I had to move on. I will try to work on this now and present it to the staff if possible. I reasoned with them that since during this coming summer they will be doing the same thing, but for the FDP, why not get in practice now? And I further reasoned that this would free us to open new areas in which to work. They seemed agreeable to this suggestion right away, but I asked them to think about it until I got them all in one spot and let everyone have his say-so. So now I have to set up this meeting.

I haven't mentioned anything about removing any of the staff or getting more staff in because I think the new project director might have ideas about that. I do have one suggestion, though. The district director ought to be given some expense money to get around to the projects to see what's going on. I have been putting a severe strain on the Hattiesburg project because none of the other projects ever had any dough for me to use, and my own had long since run out. So, could a provision be made for the district director's expenses.

Finally, I'd like to say "thanks" to all those in the 5th with whom I've worked closely. Things always haven't been smooth sailing between us, but still I think you've caught more hell from the Man Downtown, than from me. And I'd like to say thanks to the personnel in Atlanta and Jackson offices who, no matter how much I've bitched and no matter how many other things they had to do, always seemed to find time to give our district some attention.

In the beginning God made idiots: that was for practice. Then He made the Mississippi Legislature and the Mississippi County Registrar. And now you have your job cut out for you.....

Yours for Freedom, Justice, Equality, Brotherhood,
Solidarity, Medicare for SNCC Field Secretaries,
Planned Parenthood, Planned Economy,
Agrarian Reform.....AND.....
The Free Black Peoples Republics of Alabama,
Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

Sandy Leigh