

FIELD REPORT
PHILLIPS COUNTY (March 22-30, 1965)

3/22/65 (4)

Monday, March 22, 1965

We had a Mass Meeting at Springlake Baptist Church at Southland. This was our first meeting in Southland. It is the beginning of our organizing in that community. Jerry Casey, SNCC Project Director for St. Francis County, was the guest speaker. The turnout was small but their attitude seemed favorable for further visits.

Today also began the trial of Irvin Lacy, a 16-year old Negro accused of raping a white woman. Three Negroes were on the panel. The woman was called as the first witness. Lawyer George Howard of Pine Bluff and the NAACP caught her in many contradictions. Later the examining doctor testified that he found no evidence of forceful entry.

Tuesday, March 23, 1965

Lacy Case resumed. It took the panel only 50 minutes to return a verdict of guilty. The verdict had to be unanimous since it was a capital offense (sentence was life imprisonment). The case will be appealed. One of the Negroes on the jury was the principal of the Negro Juniata High School, one was a big farmer in the county and the third was the wife of the president of the Phillips County NAACP.

Wednesday, March 24, 1965

The West Side Voters League of West Helena held their weekly meeting. The Lacy case was brought up. The 75 people attending the meeting showed much concern over the result of the trial and particularly upset because there were three Negroes on the jury.

At the meeting we also decided that we would continue testing public accommodations on Saturday, and that we would continue to apply for jobs at the downtown stores. At this time several Negro youths have applied for jobs but at this time we have had no success. In line with this we have formed a committee to speak with the Mayor and the business leaders about job hiring. Our ultimate weapon and one which we expect to have to use is a selective buying campaign. First, though, we are giving them every chance to comply amicably.

Thursday, March 25, 1965

Roosevelt Jacobs, a volunteer, went to the Lakeview High School in the community of Lakeview. The principal allowed him to visit all the classes and talk about SNCC. Several good contacts have resulted from this. This will make it much easier to organize the town.

Friday, March 26.

The day was spent talking to the West Helena people about future action. We also made some new contacts with people from Lee County. We will visit these people to try to organize that county and also to talk with them about our "People's Conference" late in May.

Saturday, March 27, 1965

At 5:00 p.m., we met at the Greater First Baptist Church for the purpose of testing public accommodations. Stan was to take three teenagers to the bowling alley. A group of two women and 4 young teenagers went to a cafe. Three young adults went to a Steak House and one man and four teenagers went to a truck stop. To our great amazement there was no incident at the bowling alley. The entire county is buzzing about this because now there is more than just the American Legion Hut (dance) for entertainment for the Negro population. This is the 4th time we have gone to Gene's Steak House. As in all previous attempts there were no incidents. At the cafe, the group was cordially served but when they returned to their car, they found that the windshield had been cracked. The group at the Truck Stop was served in a very rude manner and while they were eating a white man came up behind one of the boys and punched him in the face. The group immediately left (this was not intended to be a demonstration). Bottles were hurled at them but no further damage was inflicted.

Sunday, March 28, 1965

Howie, Roosevelt Jacobs and Cat Lamar, another volunteer, went to Lakeview to attend an NAACP Mass Meeting. We got there early. There were about 75-100 people there, but none of the speakers had arrived (Guest speaker was Daisy Bates, noted especially for her involvement in the '57 Crisis). The man chairing the meeting was from West Helena. He recognized me and asked if I would speak to the group. This gave me a good opportunity to counteract

the do-nothing approach of the NAACP. From the comments later I think we had some success.

That afternoon, Jerry Case was married. Many of the state staff attended the wedding. That evening we had a Mass Meeting in West Helena. Rain kept the crowd smaller than usual but it was very successful in that many of the people who attended had never been to any of our meetings.

Monday, March 29

Howie made a report to the FBI about Saturday's incidents. (I don't expect anything to happen as a result). The woman whose windshield was broken called the cafe owner about it. He checked to see if he had insurance to cover it. Later that day, the woman received a call from a man who identified himself as a member of the Ku Klux Klan. He said that they were watching her. She said "Fine, why don't you come over to the house. It will be much easier to watch, then." She reported this to the FBI when they came to get her report of what had happened Saturday.

Tuesday, March 30, 1965.

Stan went to Marianna (Lee County) to see if we could expand our work and also to talk about our People's Conference. Tonight the West Side Voters League will hold its regular weekly meeting. I have been invited to speak to the Young Men's Club. This is the first time in the nine weeks that I've been here that they have shown any willingness to meet with us. This is another symptom of the fact that things are beginning to happen here.

Tomorrow the committee to speak to the Mayor will meet to discuss its plans and to draw up a list of demands.

Howard Himmelbaum

Stanley Tillman