

MEMO ON PROPOSED TEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR FORREST  
CITY, ARKANSAS

Twenty young adults between the ages of 14 and 18, either cannot or refuse to return to the all-Negro Lincoln High School in Forrest City, Arkansas. These same young adults do desire to attend the predominantly white Forrest City High School, but at present, registration is closed. On October 2-4, a delegation of students and SNCC workers from Forrest City went to Washington, D.C., to present an open letter and discuss their grievances with a number of officials: Mr. John Doar of the U.S. Department of Justice; Mr. Harry Wright of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, Civil Rights Compliance Division; Mr. John Cohen Assistant to Congresswoman Edith Greene of Oregon; Congressman John Conyers of Michigan; Dr. Samuel Love of the National Education Association; and Mr. Samuel P. Ethridge, the Assistant Secretary for Field Services of the National Education Association.

Appendix A is a copy of the open letter presented in Washington. We believe that the situation in Forrest City and the reasons the students are unwilling to return to the Negro School cannot be understood without knowledge of these grievances and events.

The students do not wish to return to the Lincoln High School for a number of reasons:

1. They recognize that they will not receive fair treatment at the Negro school.
2. They recognize that they will not receive an adequate education at the Negro school.
3. They consider their attendance at this Negro school an act of capitulation as long as the intolerable conditions there are not changed.
4. They desire to remain out of the inferior Negro school until investigations which were promised in Washington are completed and resultant changes enacted.
5. They consider their enrollment at the white Forrest City High School a positive step which they will take as soon as registration is reopened by the Office of Education.

SNCC workers hope to establish some temporary education situation for these 20 students for three reasons:

First, we do not want them to be deprived of their right to continue their education now at the very point when they have reacted positively against the inferior system under which they were enrolled.

Second, we believe that some of the finest leaders for this community can come out of this group of twenty young adults. We realize, however that if the present stalemate and the existing vacuum is permitted to continue in their education careers, these students will be sent to Chicago, St. Louis, New York or elsewhere by their parents so that they may continue their education. We of SNCC would look upon the departure of these 20 courageous young people as a tragic loss to the movement at its present stage, the Negro community, and the larger community as a whole in Forrest City.

Third, we also seek some temporary educational situation because

these 20 young adults are the most concerned, most involved and generally superior students. They consequently have reacted most against the present educational system which teaches them subjugation, servitude and compliance with the evils of their society. They have some of the ripest minds in the community. They sincerely seek to continue developing their minds while the investigations are in process.

Over the past few weeks, attempts have been made to place the young people in other schools in this area. We have approached Mr. E.E. Norman, the Negro director of Christ Church School, a private Negro Episcopal School in Forrest City, and explained our predicament and inquired as to the possibility of these students' enrolling in his school. Mr. Norman, when first approached, was in sympathy with our cause and asked that we have students submit applications. He explained that his school was overcrowded (187 students at present when it should have 150 students). But he and Father Henry L. Parker, a Negro member of the School Board of the Christ Church School. One condition for acceptance of the students, agreed to for SNCC by Tex Lowe and Dwight Williams, was an understanding that SNCC would solicit funds for an additional teacher, for tuitions and textbooks, and would also make the Freedom Center facilities available for classrooms. This meeting took place on Friday, October 1, prior to the Washington trip.

When the students returned from Washington, they called Mr. Norman on Saturday, October 9. He reversed his previous support of their enrollment saying, "I have already refused others because I am overcrowded. I can't accept you now." Five students visited Mr. Norman on Monday, October 11, 1965. He again stated that he could not accept them into his school. We surmised from this conversation that Mr. Norman was being pressured by white members of the Christ Church School Board, some of whom are also members of the much criticized Forrest City Special School District #7 School Board. Thus, he could not really accept these students as he wanted to. At present, SNCC workers are conducting classes for these students.

We hope that you can help us in the development of a substitute educational opportunity for these young people. We envision setting up a temporary school, which would include one certified, experienced teacher, an additional volunteer teacher from Forrest City or elsewhere in Arkansas. An appendix, which follows, includes a preliminary analysis of financial requirements for this school. We stress that this is a preliminary proposal and we hope that you will feel free to criticize the estimates and anything included.

Although at present there are only 20 students that are still out of school as the result of the demonstrations, we feel that if the proposed Temporary Education Program for Forrest City becomes a reality, there is a strong possibility that more students might become involved. Many students who have returned to the Negro Lincoln High School did so only because their parents were pressured into encouraging them to do so. After the need for this temporary school has passed, the remaining materials could be used in SNCC supported tutorial programs and Freedom Schools elsewhere in the state of Arkansas.