

FREEDOM PRIMER REPORT

- Judy Richardson

As of December 19, 1965, the following was the state of the Freedom Primers:

Total amount received from sale of Primers..... \$1,261.00

Total amount of books released..... 6,792

to the South..... 1,999

to the North..... 638 (for schools and organizers,
not including any other northern
destinations)

Total amount of boxes left at garage (130 per box)..... 25

Total amount of books left at garage..... 3,250

Several people wrote in to tell of their reactions to the books. In all letters sent out to those who would be using the books with others (students or adults) I asked that they write me back telling of the reactions of the users to the books and any suggestions they might have. Some simply wrote that they were very excited about the book and that the folks they were working with couldn't put the book down. But others went further to explain some suggestions they felt would be useful. The following are some of these suggestions:

From Bryant George of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. — he felt the ideas involved in the DuBois-Washington split should have been more detailed. Wanted some mention of Negroes in the West Indies, the Negro church (and religion in general) and Negro colleges. Also he talked about the Negro artisan prior to Reconstruction, the role of the freedman during slavery and what he calls "forces of oppression" — unions, politicals, businessmen's associations, uncle toms, inertia, apathy, etc.

From Ernest Calloway, Teamsters Research Dept. — felt the portion on DuBois was out of proportion with the "long historical view". Said the material on him was lifted from "CP theoretical journals." He wanted mention of the role Negroes played in organized and unorganized labor (from post bellum period to Randolph at March on Washington).

From Mrs. Dorothy Sterling, author of Lift Every Voice — thought dialect of Harriett Tubman is jarring and probably phony and should be translated into "acceptable English". Felt should mention Robert Smalls, the slave who stole a confederate gunboat and became congressman from South Carolina sometime later. Thought we should put in something about the 2 Negro senators from Mississippi during Reconstruction.

Someone also suggested that the flight of slaves into Indian villages didn't cause "whole tribes to become part of the Negro race", but rather, the reverse.

A couple of other people suggested an idea for other Primers: the whole cultural thing — music, dance, etc. One person suggested it as an idea to be included into this Primer, while the other (Rudy Lombard) felt it might be used as the topic for a whole new primer.

From Lucy Montgomery — she suggested going into the impact (on the students themselves) of the Mississippi Summer Project and the original purposes behind it. Also mentioned the topics of organizing unemployed and under-paid (Negro and white) in future Primers after these organizing efforts make it through ~~the~~ their embryonic stages.

A couple of project workers mentioned that it was too vague in places. One guy wondered what it meant to say that there were "slave revolts that worked" when slavery was maintained after the revolt was squashed. Another wondered about the line "SNCC and CORE rode across the color line in the Freedom Rides" — he felt it could be made clearer.

Sterling Stuckey of the Amistad Society in Chicago offered the following — he felt a whole chapter of the book should be devoted to John Brown, that the addition of people like Ida B. Wells and the expansion of the chapter on Reconstruction would be good. Felt the latter should include the black codes and other relevant facts concerning this period. He thought we should emphasize the catholicity of Douglass' interests: freedom for Ireland, peace work, women's rights. He had some corrections to make on Frederick Douglass, Reconstruction and the pulling out of troops as having been dated after the election of Hayes.

It seems that a number of northerners were disturbed by the fact that King was not mentioned. None of the southerners who received the books mentioned this at all. Mrs. Magee from Jackson, Miss. did, however, feel that Medgar Evers should have been included.

The general reaction to the Primers has been really great. Several staff people have told of folks in their areas who reported they couldn't put the book down once they started reading it. One young guy in Tennessee reads the book over every morning as he makes breakfast.

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I've sent the book to a number of southern teachers and 2 of them are using the Primers in class — in Greensboro, Alabama and at LeMoyne College in Memphis.

The books have also gone to northern groups like the Akron-Summit Tutorial Project in Akron, Ohio, Mobilization for Youth in N.Y.C., Watts for Action in Los Angeles, etc. All these groups have been very enthusiastic about the books. The books have also been sent to the NSM Freedom Library in Philly, as well as ACT and DCCO in Chicago.

No school systems have as yet adopted the books into their curriculum; however, individual teachers are using the books, particularly those teaching in the ghettos of New York, California and Chicago, etc.

We have been contacted by about 8-10 bookstores who have placed orders with us on the basis of a 90¢ per book discount, or rather, the books are sold to them for 90¢. Almost all these who originally placed orders, reordered soon afterward.

I mentioned plans for revisions to many of those who requested the first edition. Such people were particularly enthusiastic about the inclusion of a section on Malcolm X. Many folks who received the first edition want to be assured that they will be notified how they can obtain a copy of the second edition as soon as it is published.