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"THE LOUD, PROUD, BLACK KIDS TAKE A SEVEN-WEEK CURE

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"We kept going. I don't care how much trouble we had. They even bombed our church. Everything they tried to do. That didn't stop us from going to school, because xx we still going. And maybe it's not but 20 going back or 15 this year. But I know we going back. My mother signed us right back over there. And I'm glad she did."

"The solution to this problem is not food alone. It's the problem to be classified as a human being."

Speaking are victims--and victors--of school desegregation in Mississippi. Two hundred of them spent seven weeks this summer working fractions, writing compositions, and drawing in rivers and boundaries (including the Missouri Compromise Line) on outline maps while their lashes healed and their strength renewed.

They were students in the Tougaloo Summer Enrichment Program, a residential tutorial project housed on a junior college campus in West Point, Mississippi. Their teachers were 10 Smith students, 10 Amherst students, 10 Tougaloo students, and 6 Mississippi teachers (one white). Two black and two white "counselors"--one a trained psychologist--a Negro director, a white assistant director, a white business manager, and a white administrative secretary completed the staff.

Each bearing his personal history plus three hundred and fifty years of America's racial history, these 250 individuals played all the tortured games that Americans have so long practiced playing with each other, experienced all the dilemmas, expressed all the guilt and resentment. The adults' conflicts swirled about the children--and so did their love and respect. ("What was the best thing about the program?" the staff evaluation questionnaire asked. "The loud, proud, black kids themselves," a Tougaloo girl student responded.) So the children ignored the conflicts when they could (having had

plenty of experience in surviving conflict situations) and, when they couldn't, threaded their way by making illogical choices. Confronted with a choice between black power and integration, for example, they chose both. They arrived brimming with the anxiety that comes from pain, and they left brimming with the determination that comes from pain.

Some 10,000 Negro students all over Mississippi had entered predominantly white schools in September 1966. Of these, the 150 in Grenada (population 8,000, about half white) are best known to the outside world. On June 14, 1966, the Meredith March passed through Grenada and carried the town into the twentieth century. (Meredith's own encounter in summer 1967 with the loud, proud, black kids was something else!) After a summer in which local Negroes with the support of SCLC demonstrated and boycotted for integrated facilities, including integrated voter registration rolls, and local whites with the support of law-enforcing authorities fought savagely to retain their feudal rights, school opened.

Dressed in first-day-of-school freshness, the 150 Negro children who sought to enter the previously all-white elementary and high schools were met by roving bands of white adults armed with axe handles, lead pipes, chains, and guns.

"There was one crippled girl in the group. And as we got halfway to the school, they was a lot of grownups--white grownups--with sticks, bricks, guns, axe handles, everything--you name it they had it. And when we got halfway they said, 'Here come them niggers. Let's get 'em.' . . . And some was fallin' in the street, you know sliding. And some was getting beat up . . . . And we finally made it back to the church."

The mob beat the crippled girl, who couldn't run away, and when she tried to get up, a man with a gun said, "Nigger, you move I shoot your brain out." Finally she was released and told not to come back (to the white school).

The approximately fifty Grenada kids who did come back and the other

children who attended white schools throughout the state experienced a variety of relationships, mostly unpleasant, from white classmates and teachers during the school year.

"Every time you sit down, all those whites around me, they'd say 'Nigger, you stink. Nigger, nigger, nigger.' And they'd throw things. And throw spitballs. And the teacher say don't always be telling her everything."

"In class, they call me 'kookie,' they call me 'nigger,''sad,' 'sick,' 'look at that nigger, she don't know nothing.'"

"Two of the boys, their father beat up my father in the dark. They picked at me at home, on the roadside, in town, but most of all in school. I can't even sit in the library and concentrate but here come Frankie and Jim: 'All right, nigger, I'm gonna get you like my daddy got your daddy.'"

"There was a girl. Margaret. She smiled at me the first day. She asked my my boy friend's name. And I told her. Next day William says, 'Margaret, what you doin' talkin' to that nigger?' And she said, 'I'm not studying about you, William, because the same man made her made me.'"

"I stayed in the office more than I did in class. Every time I would go down the hall, there was some kid they would hit me, they would spit in my face, run into me, knock me into the wall. All right, I would go to the office and report it. Next thing I know I'd be in my class and I'd be called into the office, asking why did I spit in the kid's face or why did I hit a kid. And when I'd tell about it, the principal he would say, 'I think you'd better step out, young lady, because you getting qhite sassy around here.'"

"One day I give a oral book report in history. And the kids was re-e-eal quiet. I mean they hush. And when I finish a boy says, 'You know, Miss Clay, you should give Jeanette a A for that.' But I got a F. . . . But that Miss Clay . . . she was old."

Mississippi measures at or next to the bottom of almost every index of

educational achievement: teachers' salaries; percent of high school students who graduate; school expenditure per pupil. "The only reason we're not the 56th state in the Union," Fannie Lou Hamer says, "is because they don't have 56 states." But even in Mississippi, white education is vastly more demanding than Negro education. (For one thing, the textbooks in Negro schools--where there are textbooks--frequently consist of the sweepings from the white schools. This practice, by the way, of packing up about-to-be discarded textbooks and shipping them to the black schools is not confined to Mississippi; the writer observed it in New York City.) Thus while most of them were long familiar with physical work, it was not until they entered the white schools that many of the Negro students were introduced to work in school.

"You gonna have to study. I mean study," a veteran of last year told an audience of kids who planned to go to the white schools this year. "Every week, I mean every week, you have a vocabulary test, you have a book report, you have a lot to do. I mean a lot."

Many of the kids failed one or more courses--some failed all. And when a Miss Clay gave an F to a student who had got A's and B's in the easy-going Negro school, he wouldn't know, the assistant director at West Point said, "whether it was punishment for being black or whether it was because he was nothing."

The Tougaloo Summer Enrichment Program was designed to strengthen the integrating students both in their ability and in their will to stick it out in the white schools and hopefully to provide a model for other programs throughout the state and throughout the South.

The 200 tutees lived in dormitories along with their college-student tutors. From 8 o'clock, after breakfast, until 12 o'clock, lunch, they attended two classes conducted by regular teachers and two small-group follow-up sessions, conducted by college-student tutors. Each tutor had the same group of 6 or 7 tutees for all subjects all summer and had far more influence

over them than their teachers did. All tutees took English, math, science, and social studies at his school grade level. Regrouped by counties, rather than by school grades, each tutee met once each week in a "county counseling" session with one of the four counselors. There they discussed their home and school experiences and together sought meaning in the direction of their lives. Late-afternoon activities consisted of "special interest" groups: art, music, French, Spanish, Russian, drama, newspaper, and a very popular course in Negro history which was attended by many tutors as well as by tutees. There was a constant sound of shuffling and dribbling from the basketball court, and two or three times/weekly evenings a bus took a group to a nearby "Negro" swimming pool. The tutees all went home for one weekend, hosting visits by their tutors. ("Take a tutor home to your mother. They're better than flowers," reads an ad in the project's West Point Free Press.) Tutors took their own little groups on short excursions and pincics, scrapping like jackals for the two project cars. The whole company took one much-acclaimed trip to New Orleans and one to Memphis, upon which latter there came to center the bitterest intergroup histilities of the entire summer. Evenings there were movies, talent shows, dances, and plays. ~~evenings.~~ And a series of outside speakers, the responses to whom probably best represent the project's exuberant unifying spirit amid so much distress and dissension.

The summer's healing process began with two or two and a half weeks of something like mass psychic breakdown. Magnified summer homesickness on the part of the many tutees who had never/been previously away from home for a night, rarely left their home counties, plus a release of nine months of impossibly overtaxed restraints ("I don't cry. I never cry when they hit me," a Grenada girl said of her school experiences.), plus the anxieties of those who by their presence were committed to attend white schools this September produced an epidemic of strange ailments, imaginary appendicitises, falling-out, hysteria. One girl thought she was going blind. The whole campus seemed to

be accident-prone. One of a group of girls in a dorm lounge at night during a thunder storm "saw" a man behind a fluttering curtain, and the whole group panicked, knocking one another down as they rushed from the room. Three or four had hysteria on and off for several days. Some would pass out cold into the arms of a favorite Negro male tutor when they happened to pass him by in a hallway. (This very tutor was at once the most outspoken apostle of black power, frequently harsh and bitter with the white tutors, and a great influence on tutees as well as on his fellow tutors, including these same whites.)

The seizures gradually stopped. The productive daily routine was therapeutic and a number of special events helped. The students began to confront their past and future experiences. A reporter for the West Point Free Press interviewed tutees who had previously attended white schools, one of whom said, "I'm going back to the white school next year because I got my class ring a year earlier than the colored schools. And I also think that I can learn more." A white high school graduate from Jackson addressed the group and told about a Negro classmate who had made the basketball team and was retained and honored despite objections from other teams that they played. The county groups began to go home for their weekends.

Marian Wright, young Jackson attorney, came and spoke. It was she who had initiated the program when she came to recognize that without supportive action in the Negro community her legal efforts for desegregation would be barren. She said, "I know how hard it is for you to go on in the white schools. . . . Your friends stay away from you because they say you think you're better than them. . . . The white children will harrass you. . . . But stick it out. We need you people. In the next few years, all of the civil rights leaders will be gone and where are the new ones coming from? You, the young people of Mississippi, must stay here and carry on the fight for justice, truth, freedom. . . ."

Meantime a student government was being organized, and with the aid of

the young tutors, the tutees began to express their turbulent feelings in the now classical pattern: protest to the administration at dormitory rules; complaints about the food; demands for a TV in the lounge, for weekend trips, for live bands at weekend dances, and for a student-run assembly to tell about their experiences at integrated schools. The director was bewildered and distressed: the tutors themselves had participated in making the rules and were now instigating a protest against him. With hardly the amount of shilly-shallying required by decency, but feeling that they were getting "more freedom than they knew how to handle," the director met the tutees' demands. Some of the tutors who wished the black director to be a "strong father figure" probably had hoped for a tougher fight.

At the student-run assembly which they had demanded, a panel of veterans told about their experiences in the white schools, not leaving out the brutalities, the humiliations, the injustices. (Interestingly, teacher and principal "unfairness" seems to produce more lasting and bitterer resentment than physical brutality.) They repeated again and again how you have to work to pass. The student chairman expressed the generation's intention to assume responsibility when he summed up: "If something happen to you, you should know enough about the Movement and different things to carry this to some person that is in leadership of the Negroes. Take these cases to somebody. Don't wait around for things to pile up on your parents."

The entire campus now moved on to the next and final phase of the treatment by ordeal. Among the protagonists and issues were: James Meredith vs. Fannie Lou Hamer; the black director vs. the white assistant director (possibly more as symbols than in themselves); black tutors vs. white tutors; black power vsl integration; a trip to Tuskegee to see a football game vs. a trip to an amusement park.

The tutees were readied for their encounter with Meredith not only by their experiences in organizing "against" the administration but by the

constant emphasis in all their academic work on speaking out, expressing opinions, asking questions. They challenged the competency of one of their teachers. They wrote essays about whether whites should learn Negro dialect and whether Thomas Jefferson, slaveowner, had a right to sign the Declaration of Independence. ("Really they shouldn't have signed and written the Declaration of Independence if the Negroes has to fight this way for equality," an eleventh-grade girl wrote.) They wrote a good deal of poetry, including counterpoems to Langston Hughes' "Florida Roadmaker," expressing what they felt to be a proper tone of militancy.

Then, on a swing through the state endorsing Ross Barnett for Governor, Meredith stopped at West Point and told the assembled tutees and staff that Vietnam was the best thing that ever happened to the American Negro (when he went into the Army, he said, he came out a sergeant); that they oughtn't to get all hung up on the race issue ("every time the white man does something to you it is not because you are black, but because he or she may not like what you are doing"); that he would only come back to Mississippi if it was to make a lot of money. The kids argued every inch of the way. "They wouldn't let him leave," a tutor said later. "They kept running along beside him tugging on his silk suit." Talking about Meredith in a final evaluation session on the next to last day, the students kept using the word "stupid": "He's only interested in himself and his family. . . . He's going to leave us behind." "James Meredith talks like a Southern white man." "He thinks he's better than anybody else just because he went to a white school." The chairman of the evaluation session that produced this judgment was a black graduate of Ol' Miss', a graduate student at the opulent white Emory University in Atlanta, and the gifted teacher of the Negro history course. He guided the group to a discussion of the role of the Negro who goes to a white school.

If James Meredith provided the white background for the tutees' definition of black self, Fannie Lou Hamer provided the mirror that reflected black

beauty and ~~warmth~~ toughness and humor. The whole campus fell in love with her--and with themselves. (In the last days of the summer the kids all went about writing their autographs and messages of friendship to eternity in each other's copies of Fannie Lou Hamer's autobiography.)

"People like you," she began in her measured, ~~intimate~~, contralto tones, "my own black people, people that care, black and white, gives me the strength to keep me going. Because today this is a beautiful audience, and without knowing the true facts about our country, you will not be able to stand up and fight for what we don't have now." They asked her about Vietnam and she said, "I just don't see no sense in me fightin' somewhere else for somethin' I don't have here." They asked her if she thought it was right for black kids to ~~want to~~ go to white schools and she said, "If I had the chance, baby, I would go in there with you." They asked her what she thought about James Meredith endorsing Ross Barnett and she brought down the house with, "Is I'm going to have to answer about poor little Meredith?" Someone asked, "In your book you talk about Africa a lot, and could you tell us why you decided to come back and make your life in the United States?" She responded with indignation: "Why did I decide to come back? I was born here and I have a right to be here! America is ours and we have a right to fight to make it a better place for us."

Mostly they asked about black power and nonviolence, because by the time Fannie Lou Hamer came all libido seemed to be running into the black-white conflict. A build-up of summer-long and life-long resentments had erupted in a guyser of accusations and counter-accusations: The white tutors were pushing their superior education and abilities. The black tutors were goofing off. People from the North were giving the kids notions about personal freedom that were inappropriate for Southern Negro children. A white clicque was running the office. Black tutors (alternatively, white tutors) had unfair advantage in using the cars. The white assistant director was

really the boss behind the boss. The black director was a negligent administrator. The black tutors were instilling hate in the innocent tutees. The white architects of the program had engineered that the white tutors outnumber the black tutors and that a black director be a front for white control.

The issue was finally drawn over a trip: the black tutors (with some white defectors) wanted to go to Montgomery and a football game at Tuskegee; and the white tutors (with some blakk defectors) wanted to go to Grenada Lake, an amusement park. The white tutors were accused of rejecting Tuskegee because it was a Negro institution. In a series of meetings and backroom discussions the tutees were involved. The issue was brought to the director. "They asked me," he said, "if I wanted to go to Tuskegee and the assistant director wanted to go to Grenada Lake, where would we go. They were trying to pit me against him, you see. I said I would decide. That got the loudest applause of the evening." He did decide: they went neither to Tuskegee nor to Grenada Lake but to Memphis.

But the tutees were muttering that the white tutors "didn't want us to have any fun" and were using their superior voting power to control the trip choice, that all the Negroes were being used to get money, prestige, position for whites. Five or six girl tutees cornered a Smith girl one day and poured their resentments and wrath upon her, shouting and spitting and threatening to "beat her ass"--an amateur rendition in blackface of the old familiar act. The frighted Smith girl was "rescued" by a Tougaloo boy. She said later that she came close to hating those girls for turning on her, for denying the sincerity of her summer's dedication. She also said, "I feel that this summer has been the most exciting and instructive of my life. These students have taught me more about being a real person than school has ever taught me. I guess I envy their dedication and their complete participation in their goals. I feel, too, that if I go back to

North and continue living the life I led before, that I will be betraying not only these students, but myself and my country as well."

The trip crisis and its aftermath became the group's vehicle for a kind of orgy of self-examination which lasted until the program's end.

What are white people like? "Some are all right, but they're white." "Like dogs." "They are two-faced and they still think they are better than you." "Whites are human like us."

Can a black kid learn how to be a black man from a white man? "If you wanted to learn to be a carpenter, you'd get apprenticed to a carpenter, not a bricklayer."

If you had your choice, would you choose a black tutor or a white tutor? "Negro, because when they speak you can understand better their dialect. Things that Negroes say have a true meaning." "White, because a white teacher or tutor never taught me. I want to see how their mind work. Is their mind different from my mind?" "Negro, because that's my race. It will treat me better than the white." "Negro, because he is my color and he seem more close to me than the white."

Should another program like this have a staff that's all Negro, mostly Negro, half and half, mostly white, all white? "Mostly Negro, so when they vote on a trip they can't outvote the Negro tutors." "Half and half, because you could get used to the idea of going to a white school." "White and colored so that when kids who might be afraid of white people when they go to the white school can feel a little more secure." "I think that this whole program should be run by Negroes, who are trying to get our freedom. Let the poor whites get their own." "Half and half because the whites have been exposed to much more in many fields and should be able to relate their knowledge to the Negro tutors and students." "Half and half, because I believe some white folks like working with the Negro children so you can give them a chance, too." "All black: I think that it is time for