

[1964?]

Memorandum

COFO  
1017 Lynch St.  
Jackson, Mississippi

TO: MISSISSIPPI COMMUNITY CENTER WORKERS  
FROM: Miss. Summer Project Staff  
SUBJECT: Overview of the Community Centers

The community centers are conceived as a permanent institution rather than a summer "crash" program. The centers will ultimately provide a structure for a wide range of educational and recreational programs. In doing this, they will not only serve basic needs of Negro communities now virtually ignored by the social services provided by the State, but they will form a dynamic focus for developing community organization.

For the summer project, we hope to start community centers in 17 locations, spread over 16 counties. The arrangements are still not final in some of these locations, but most of them are assured (as of May 25). Community centers will start out in houses, old schoolhouses, and church basements, for the most part. One is in an old Day-Care Center; another occupies the second story of a downtown business building. We hope that the community centers will eventually occupy permanent buildings, and two centers already have plans for such new buildings. Until the program is actually serving the community, however, we cannot attract the money for nice buildings.

The community centers are planned as a base for a battery of programs. Briefly, these programs are:

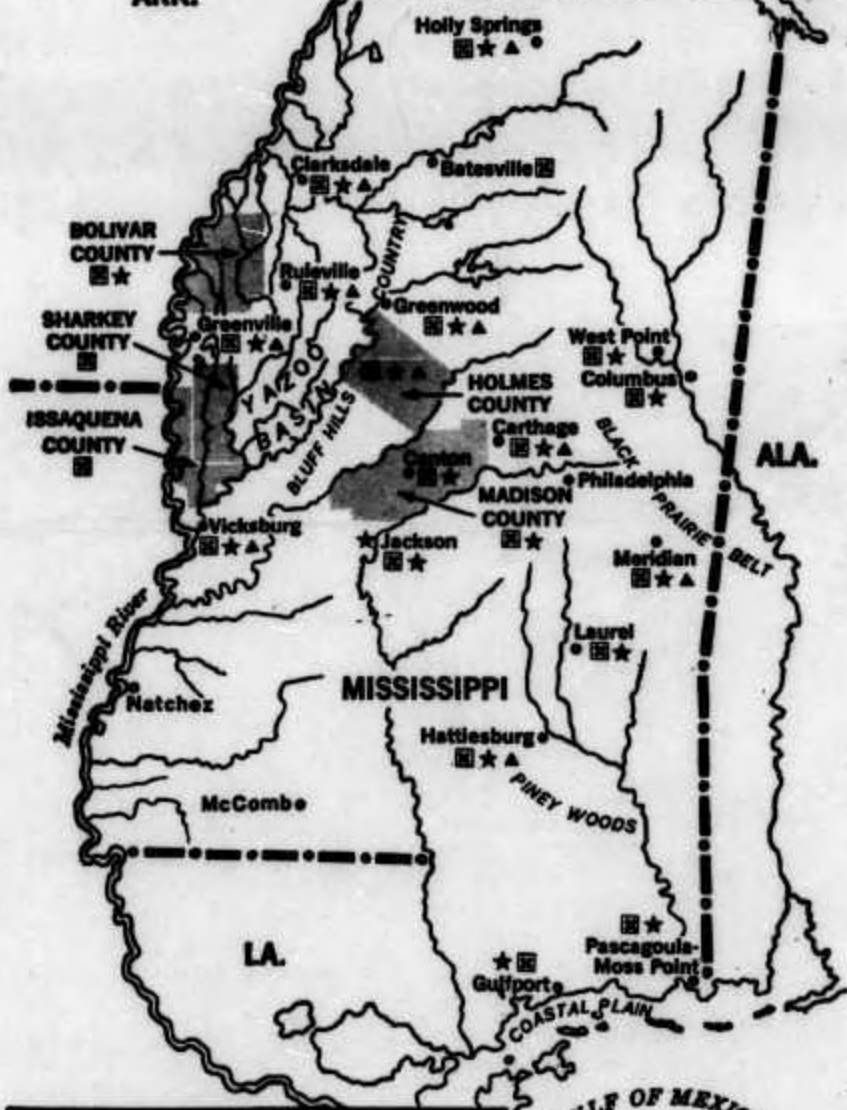
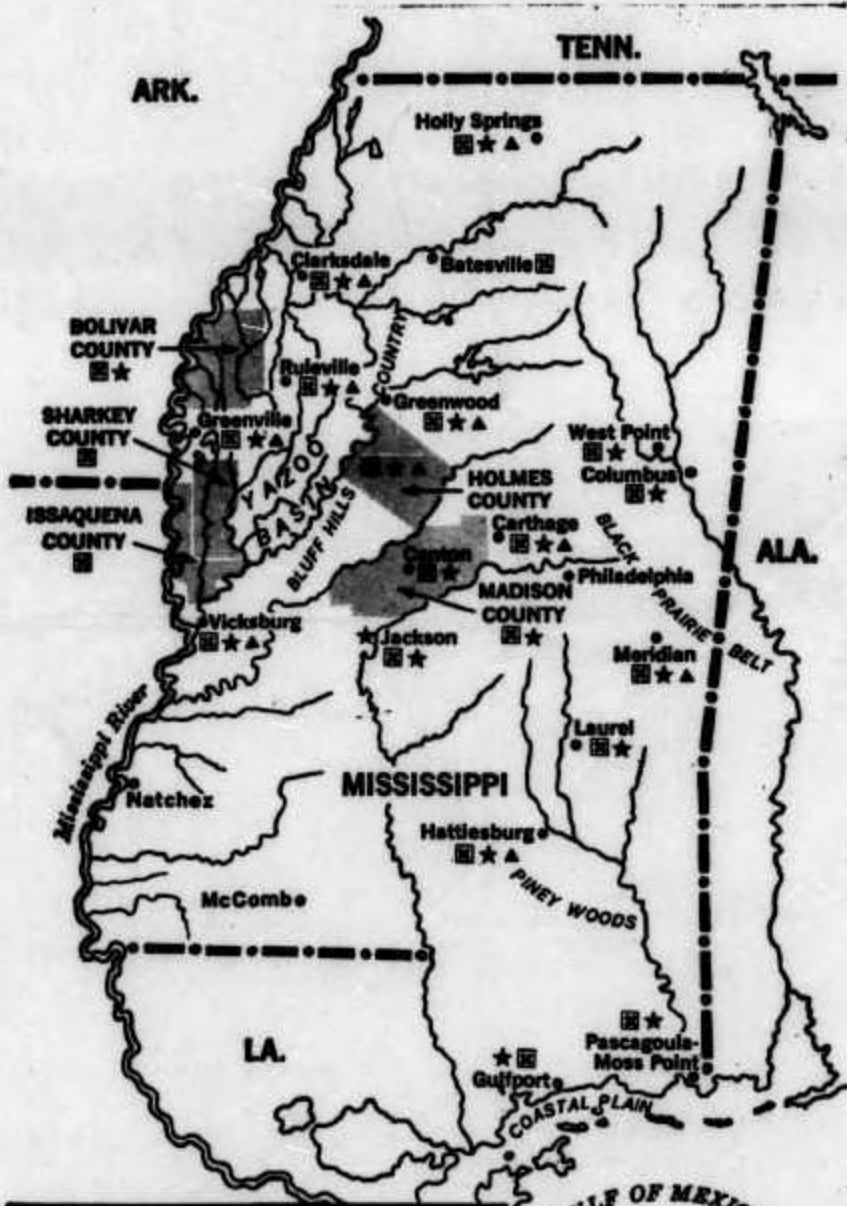
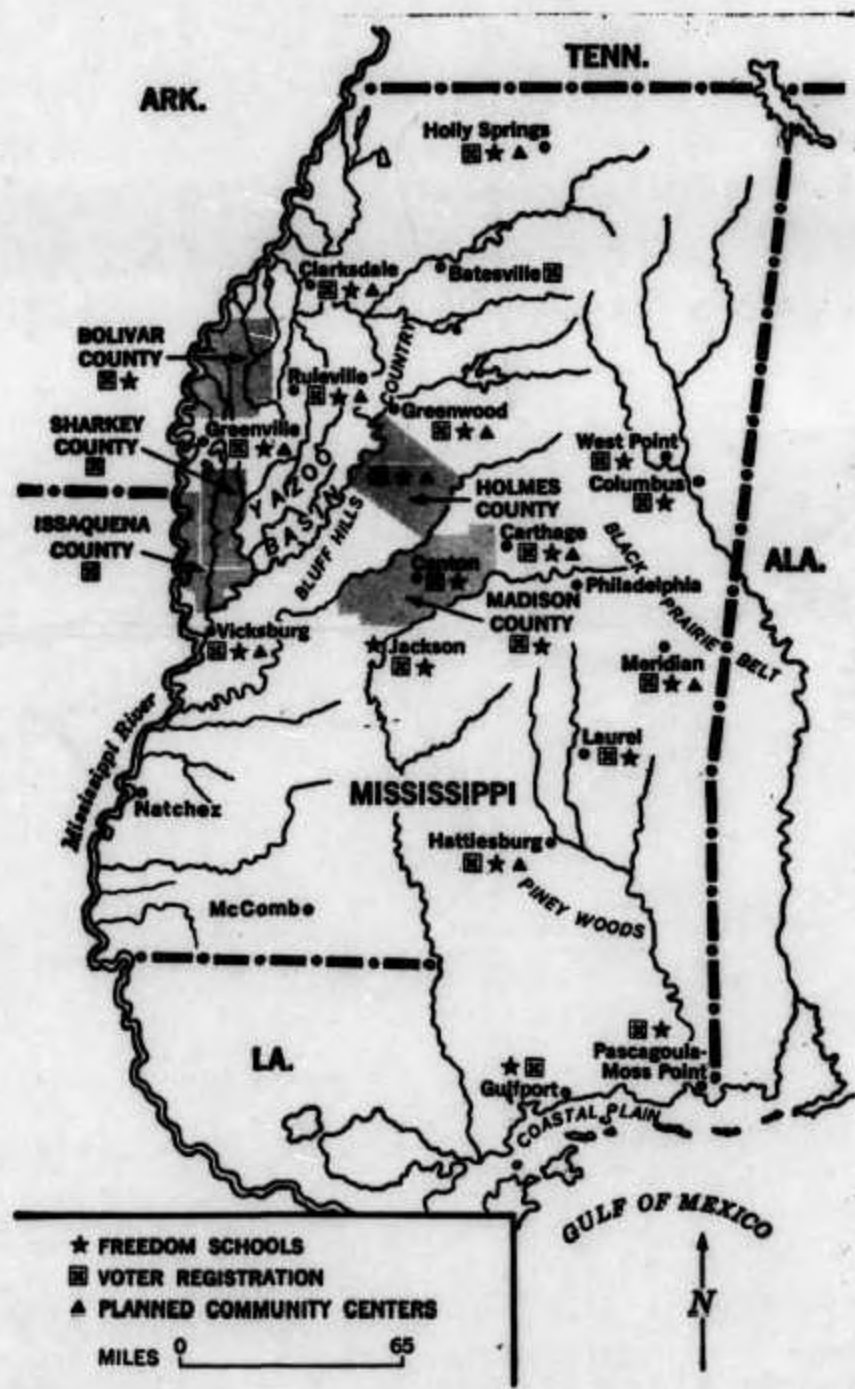
1. Library--a small lending library, averaging 10,000 volumes for each center.
2. Recreation--films and discussion groups for adults, dancing and sports (ping-pong, etc. inside, and outdoor sports such as baseball where there is a playing field) for teenagers.
3. Day care--singing, games and stories for small children. Refreshments where we can afford them.
4. Literacy and basic education--tutorial study for adults, and remedial study for students.
5. Citizenship--in four areas: voting regulations, duties of citizens, Negro history and American history.
6. Health--informal classes in the general areas of prenatal care, infant care, sanitation and public health services.
7. Drama, dancing, arts and crafts, music, etc.--depending upon the talents of the staff and interested local people.
8. Federal programs--educational service to inform Mississippians of the help that is available to them if they apply for it.
9. Home improvement--home repair, sewing, etc.
10. Vocational training--probably will have to be deferred until the centers are well-established in the communities, and the employment situation is somewhat more open, but still a very large part of our conception of the community center programs.

The community centers positions should be regarded as jobs of initiating and training. Each center will start with a staff of 6-10 summer volunteers. During the summer, the staff will have the responsibility of organizing as many of these programs as there is need and resource for, so that there can be a good start. A second part of the job for community center personnel is to get out into the community and find local people who are interested and willing to carry on the program after the summer. In most cases, it will be necessary to teach these people for the job, since some specific knowledge and skill is required. If possible, these people should be recruited early and help all summer.

[01964]

# COFO

1017 Lynch Street  
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI



## CC Reports

Batesville: There were good mailed reports on the health facilities in Batesville. Mrs. Tranquilli and Claire O'Connor interviewed local physicians and tried to talk to the Health Department officials (who referred them to the State Health Department). Claire is unable to ~~follow~~ do much work in the community on health facilities since she is the only person left working in the center. There is great interest in the drama program. There will probably be a play production, produced and directed by local people, if soon, if they can find a suitable play. The center has started a program of taking care of the children of ~~xx~~ registration applicants while their parents go down to the Courthouse. There is an SCLC citizenship teacher in the town who is going to start acitizenship ~~class~~ in the center on Monday. They hope to get a telephone, finally, some time ~~next~~ week. The adults in the community are organizing a freedom singing group. Batesville's baseball team ~~xxxxxx~~ won its game with Holly Springs, although Holly Springs claims there was dirty work involved because the Batesville team arrived after the last Holly Springs players had gone home. The main problems of the center are the staff shortage (there is only Claire O'Connor now) and ~~the~~ unsuitable facilities. The library had to settle down in the same room as the center and voter registration office. This makes a real library and reading-encouragement program ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ almost impossible. There is a class in the center on home nursing for teenage girls. Claire is trying to organize a prenatal clinic, since the health dept. is apparently not active in this area, staffed with local physicians. This ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ may not get underway right away because of technical problems. The doctors with the Medical ~~Committee~~ on Human Rights in Clarksdale are helping to get it started.

Write to Claire O'Connor at Rt. 2, Box 20, Batesville, Miss.

Canton: The Canton center is working in two locations, one in Canton and one in the rural Valley View community. Two of the ~~xxxxxx~~ Canton center workers went down there to work this last week. In the health program, the federal programs workers are doing a study of medical facilities. The community center people may become involved later, depending upon what the federal programs workers come up with. The center is trying to get ~~mil~~ through the school-lunch program. The adult classes have had difficulty because the center presently has no place for adult classes. The SCLC Citizenship teacher has citizenship classes ~~once~~ a week. If they can't get a building soon, they'll try to get wiring for lights in a tent and pitch camp in the field next to the center. The ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ center is prepared to offer ~~xxxxxx~~ an evening program in music, dance, citizenship and literacy as soon as they can solve ~~xxxxxx~~ this problem. ~~c~~ The day care program accommodates up to fifty kids a day. They have, besides supervised recreation, music activities—piano, guitar lessons and singing—and will start this week classes in woodshop and typing. A baseball team ~~is~~ starting but has not played an out of town team yet. Tom Manoff evaluates the center's program by saying that so far nothing but the day care program is really off the ground. The other programs will probably ~~gell~~ soon, however.

Write to Tom Manoff, Sally Shideler, Margaret Benes (rural), Arlene ~~Ross~~ Bock ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ and Phil Sharpe (rural) c/s COFO, 838 Lutz Ave., Canton, Miss.

CLARKSDALE: The center formally opened last Tuesday and the programs began on Thursday. Prior to that the staff devoted itself primarily to making contacts

in the community and remodeling the center. Unfortunately Zoys Lemon had to leave because of a family emergency, and she had made most of the community contacts. ~~There is what is reported to be a fine schedule which was sent to Jackson, but which never fell into the hands of Annell or Lois. We checked with WATS line, communications people, etc., but couldn't locate the report (others take note - mail stuff to us by name, or we may never see the fruits of your labor and save ourselves some telephoning).~~ In the morning, however, Dave Batzka has informal arts and crafts classes. Other classes through the day include reading and writing and citizenship. The center classes are taught by Freedom School teachers occasionally, and there is a local citizenship teacher (not connected with the SCLC citizenship program, however). The center's activities are spread around in three locations. The library is in the Freedom House, Freedom Schools are in three church basements, and the "center" is a cleaned-up former greasy spoon restaurant. The Medical Committee doctors project also shares the community center. Write to David Batzka, Margaret Hazleton, Zoys Lemon and Mark Fast, c/o COFO, 429 Yazoo St., Clarksdale, Miss.

Greenville: The Greenville center is devoting itself to raising money for a permanent center. A project architect has designed a small building which can be built cheaply. The center staff hopes to organize community sponsorship of the center, and involve outside sponsorship as well. The present center program has to work out of the Freedom School primarily, ~~XXXXXX~~ and so there is really no distinction between the programs. The afternoon program includes what are, basically, center activities: arts and crafts, etc. There is a center newsletter and an informal journalism instruction conducted by a reporter for the Delta Democrat Times (Mississippi's liberal newspaper, obviously). Literacy training for adults is starting. One center worker, Bob Dolgoff, has gone to Leland, and his present activities are not clear. He may have left the center staff. The staff is trying to arrange for movies, since there has been a large response to the idea. The citizenship program has been hampered by the fact that the SCLC citizenship teacher is sick and doesn't want to conduct classes this year, but this problem is more apparent than real, because the whole program of the Freedom School and community center is oriented toward citizenship, and the citizenship materials come out in all phases of the program. The center staff would like a federal program's worker. There was supposed to be a baseball game between Greenville and Greenwood, but Greenwood did not show.

Write to Vicky Halper, Barbara Nutnick, Bob Dolgoff (?) and Virginia Steele at 901 1/2 Nelson St., Greenville, Miss.

Greenwood: When the report was made, only two of the six community center workers were out of jail. Evelyn Ellis and Rita Rohrbaugh survived and stayed on the job, but they had to help out with the overall confusion at the expense of the center's particular program. Before the Freedom Day activities, the center got in one full day, when everybody made signs, but in general the excitement over the Freedom Day made any kind of regular center program impossible. Write to Monroe Sharpe, Ray and Rita Rohrbaugh, Bambi Brown, Sally Belfrage, and Evelyn Ellis at 708 Ave. N, Greenwood, Miss.

Hattiesburg: The formal opening of the Center was Saturday. They have a good building which used to be a kindergarten or something, and they have ~~xxxxx~~ made a lot of effort to fix it up, paint it and make curtains, etc. Phyllis Cunningham has been visiting nurses, health department personnel, etc. She found a good white contact in her visits who ~~xxxxx~~ contributed financially to the center. Evening classes in health will start this week, and she is getting started on a home nursing course. The citizenship classes and day care will work out of the center now. The Hattiesburg center has had serious staff problems ~~xxxxx~~ culminating with a couple of defections to Laurel (see note in ~~xxxxx~~ memo on ~~xxxxx~~ how to handle such problems). There is some exchange work with the Freedom School teachers, and hopefully there will be more, because everybody is shorthanded. Write to Lorne Cress, Mary Sue Cellately, Martin Mulvain and Phyllis Cunningham at COFO, 507 Mobile St., Hattiesburg.

*Kathy Dehl has a class for future nurses.*

Holly Springs: The Holly Springs staff is really not one unit. Part of the staff works closely with the Freedom School in presenting the community programs. Others ~~xxx~~ are planning a research project in community health problems. They've been visiting appropriate state officials, and they have surveyed the local health situation re available doctors in case of sickness or injury of the staff. Everybody does some voter registration work. The day care program is incorporated into the Freedom School program. There is great concern for continuing the program after the summer project ends, because the schools are out for six to eight weeks during the fall, and the Freedom Schools and center should continue. In conjunction with the Freedom School, the center staff has dancing, singing, guitar classes, Recreation will become more institutionalized now because the center recently got some sports equipment. Ruth Koenig teaches health in the Freedom School. There are also nonviolence classes. In the morning, before classes formally begin, there is singing and someone from the VR staff talks about the program across the state. After about a half hour of this there are classes in citizenship, Negro history, politics, etc. At the same time, as an elective, there is dancing MWE and drama TTH. Next there is a choice between art, dance, sports and games, auto mechanics. After lunch there is French (a class that has generated great interest), then playwriting and religion. This is a typical day for the Freedom School. The school has a newsletter, Freedom News. In the evening there are adult classes, and all during the day there is recreation available—ping-pong and recreation. Write to Sandy Hard, Mary Jennings, Gene Hunn, Mike Clurman, Gitta Perl (?), Kathy Dehl and Ruth Koenig at 100 Rust Ave., Holly Springs, Miss. Leake County: No report. Telephone communication is terrible. No written report from them either, and no personal contact that we know of during the week. Write to Clarke Gardner, Carol Gross and Harold Aranoff, c/o S.C. Williams Store, Rt. 3, Carthage, Miss.

Meridian: The center is in the process of some fixing up. This involves moving all the books and shelves from one room into ~~xxxxxx~~ another, and painting the walls and ceiling (an electric violet in one room) and then rebuilding the shelves and piling the books up in that room. Consequently, the center is somewhat torn up right now. Classes are still difficult in the center because of all the activity. But evening classes in the Freedom School are catching on well. Ruth Gallo and Luke Asbat have started sex education classes for girls and boys, respectively, in the Freedom School, and the initial response is very good. They ~~xxxxxx~~ were

very cautious, and made sure they had the backing of the local Negro ministers before they started, but there has been no adverse reaction. Other classes in the Freedom School which are conducted by center workers are biology by Luke Kabat and an adult citizenship program in the evening. Freedom School teachers come to the center in the afternoon to help handle the kids in the recreation, reading, and arts and crafts classes. The daily trips to the park are still going well. Write to Lucien Kabat, Ruth Gallo, Freeman Cocroft at 2505 1/2 Fifth St., Meridian, Miss.

Mileston (Holmes County): No report directly, but Annell Ponder visited this week, and Edie Black reported over the telephone that they are "doing very well". They have no car and are pretty far from a telephone or anything else. No written report from them either.

Write to Gene Nelson, Mary Cole, Susan Nichols, John Allen and Ron Madison, c/o Mr. Howard, Rt. 2, Box 259, Mt. Tchula, Miss.

Ruleville: The center's programs are settling into shape. The ~~staff~~ staff is trying to make day care something more than baby-sitting. Most of the children under 12 do not read well, and the staff is making efforts to incorporate reading teaching ~~into~~ into the program. In the adult classes, only typing is distinct from the regular Freedom School classes. Adults study with teenagers. The citizenship classes teach the Constitution, Negro history, and reading, in the ~~at~~ Freedom School, without the participation of the SCLC citizenship teacher. One staff member, Ellie Siegal was arrested in Drew.

Write to Fred Miller, Ellie Siegal, Linda Davis and Heidi Dole at P.O. Box 275, Ruleville.

Shaw: