

PROSPECTUS FOR A SUMMER FREEDOM SCHOOL PROGRAM IN MISSISSIPPI

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The Proposal (originally submitted by Charles Cobb, Dec 1963)

(Although this original proposal was submitted for the Mississippi Summer Project, it is relative to all Black Belt communities where the conditions are deplorably similar, and the prospectus is pertinent to the Freedom School programs that can operate all year round.)

It is, I think, just about universally recognized that Mississippi education, for black or white, is grossly inadequate in comparison with education around the country. Negro education in Mississippi is the most inadequate and inferior in the state. Mississippi's impoverished educational system is also burdened with virtually a complete absence of academic freedom, and students are forced to live in an environment that is geared to squash intellectual curiosity, and different thinking. University of Mississippi Professor James Silver, in a recent speech, talked of "social paralysis . . . where nonconformity is forbidden, where the white man is not free, where he does not dare express a deviating opinion without looking over his shoulder." This "social paralysis" is not limited to the white community, however. There are Negro students who have been thrown out of classes for asking about the freedom rides, or voting. Negro teachers have been fired for saying the wrong thing. The State of Mississippi destroys "smart niggers" and its classrooms remain intellectual waste lands.

In our work, we have several concerns oriented around Mississippi Negro students:

1. The need to get into the schools around the state and organize the students, with the possibility of a statewide coordinated student movement developing.
2. A student force to work with us in our efforts around the state.
3. The responsibility to fill an intellectual and creative vacuum in the lives of young Negro Mississippians, and to get them to articulate their own desires, demands and questions. More students need to stand up in classrooms around the state, and ask their teachers a real question.

As the summer program for Mississippi now shapes up, it seems as if hundreds of students as well as professional educators from some of the best universities and colleges in the North will be coming to Mississippi to lend themselves to the movement. These are some of the best minds in the country, and their academic value ought to be recognized, and taken advantage of.

I would like to propose summer Freedom Schools during the months of July and August, for tenth and eleventh-grade high school students, in order to:

1. supplement what they aren't learning in high schools around the state.
2. give them a broad intellectual and academic experience during the summer to bring back to fellow students in classrooms in the state, and

3. form the basis for statewide student action such as school boycotts, based on their increased awareness.

I emphasize tenth and eleventh-grade students, because of the need to be assured of having a working force that remains in the state high schools putting to use what it has learned.

The curriculum of this school would fall into several groupings:

1. supplementary education, such as basic grammar, reading, math, typing, history, etc. Some of the already-developed programmed educational materials might be used experimentally.
2. Cultural programs such as art and music appreciation, dance (both folk and modern), music (both folk and classical), drama, possibly creative writing workshops, for it is important that the art of effective communication through the written word be developed in Mississippi students.
3. Political and social science, relating their studies to their society. This should be a prominent part of the curriculum.
4. Literature
5. Film programs.

Special projects, such as a student newspaper, voicing student opinion, or the laying of plans for a statewide student conference, could play a vital role in the program. Special attention should be given to the development of a close student-teacher relationship. Four or five students to one teacher might be good, as it offers a chance of dialogue. The overall theme of the school would be the student as a force for social change in Mississippi.

If we are concerned with breaking the power structure, then we have to be concerned with building up our own institutions to replace the old, unjust, decadent ones which make up the existing power structure. Education in Mississippi is an institution which can be validly replaced, as much of the educational institutions in the state are not recognized around the country anyway.

The Program

1. General Description: About 25 Freedom Schools are planned, of two varieties: day schools in about 20 to 25 towns (commitment still pending) and one or two boarding, or residential, schools on college campuses. Although the local communities can provide schools buildings and staff housing, all equipment, supplies and staff will have to come from the outside. Students should have an opportunity to work with the staff in other areas of the project, so that the additional experience will enrich their contribution to the Freedom School sessions.
2. Curriculum: On the weekend of March 21, and 22, the National Council of Churches sponsored a conference in N.Y.C. to develop a curriculum for the Freedom Schools. This conference brought together a group of well-qualified educators and many of the more perceptive minds presently engaged in studying our society. The conference participants

worked from a preliminary outline which laid out the basic skills which the students need to improve, divided into four areas:

I. Leadership development

a. to give students the perspective of being in a long line of protest and pressure for social and economic justice (i.e. to teach Negro history and the history of the movement.)

b. to educate students in the general goals of the movement, give them wider perspectives (enlarged social objectives, nonviolence, etc.)

c. to train students in the specific organizational skills that they need to develop Southern Negro communities:

1. public speaking

2. handling of press and publicity

3. getting other people to work

4. organizing mass meetings and workshops, getting speakers, etc.

5. keeping financial records, affidavits, reports, etc.

6. developing skill in dealing with people in the community

7. canvassing

8. duplicating techniques, typing, etc.

d. to plan with each other further action of the student movement.

II. Remedial Academic Program

a. to improve comprehension in reading, fluency and expressiveness in writing.

b. to improve mathematical skill (general arithmetic and basic algebra and geometry.)

c. to fill the gaps in knowledge of basic history and sociology, especially American.

d. to give a general picture of the American economic and political system.

e. to introduce students to art, music and literature of various classical periods, emphasizing distinctive features of each style.

f. to generate knowledge of and ability to use the scientific method.

III. Contemporary Issues

- a. to give students more sophisticated views of some current issues.
- b. to introduce students to thinking of local difficulties in a context of national problems.
- c. to acquaint students with procedures of investigating a problem-rudimentary research.

IV. Non-academic Curriculum

- a. to allow students to meet each other as completely as possible, in order to form a network of student leaders who know each other.
- b. to give students experience in organization and leadership
 - 1. field work—voter registration
 - 2. student publications
 - 3. student government
- c. to improve their ability to express themselves formally (through creative writing, drama, talent shows, semi-spontaneous discussions, etc.)

As a result of the curriculum conference, the curriculum planning took the following direction:

The aim of the Freedom School curriculum will be to challenge the student's curiosity about the world, introduce him to his particularly "Negro" cultural background, and teach him basic literacy skills in one integrated program. That is, the students will study problem areas in their world, such as the administration of justice, or the relation between state and federal authority. Each problem area will be built around a specific episode which is close to the experience of the students. The whole question of the court systems, and the place of law in our lives, with many relevant ramifications, can be dealt with in connection with the study of how one civil rights case went through the courts and was ultimately decided in favor of the defendant. The campaign of a Negro for Congress provides a basis for studying all the forces that which are against the Negro candidate, and which have worked against a Negro's even attempting to run for Congress. The challenge of the regular Mississippi delegation at the Democratic National Convention provides the starting-point for a study of the whole presidential nomination and the election procedure. These and other "case studies" which can be used to explore larger problem areas in the society will be offered to students. The Negro history outline, as presently planned, will be divided into sections to be coordinated with the problem area presentation. In this context, students will be given practice activities to improve their skill with reading and writing. Writing press releases, leaflets, etc. for the political campaign is one example. Writing affidavits and reports of arrests, demonstrations, and trials, etc. which occur during the summer in their towns will be another. Using the telephone as a campaign tool will both help the political candidates and help students to improve their technique in speaking effectively in a somewhat formal situation. By using the multi-dimensional, integrated program, the curriculum can be more easily absorbed into the direct experience of the student, and thus overcome some of the academic problems of concentration and retention.