

INFORMATION SHEET -- PROJECT MISSISSIPPI

Why is a Project of this size necessary this summer?

The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee has been initiating voter registration projects in Mississippi since 1961. In that year, a New York Negro teacher named Bob Moses, Hamilton College A.B., M.A. Harvard College, decided that his place in the Civil Rights struggle was in the Deep South, particularly the Mississippi Delta, where Negroes comprise well over half the population, and where in a majority of counties none are allowed to register to vote.

Since 1961, Moses and hundreds of other Negro and white students have been working to raise the percentage of Negroes registered to vote from its almost constant level of 12% and as you probably know, have suffered under the harassment of the deeply entrenched white power structure of that state. Lives have been lost, near misses endured, and beatings taken. Constant jailings drain the movement of both financial and manpower strength; yet Negroes are still systematically excluded from the democratic process, as well as most other areas of community life.

It is with this short but intense history that the Movement enters the summer of 1964 with a plan for several thousand northern college students to intensify voter registration efforts and to establish and maintain community education projects wherever desired.

Why a project of this size?

- 1) Outside pressure is the only solution to the racial problems of Mississippi, since as James Silver, professor of history at Ole Miss, has pointed out, the state is a "closed society" in which departure from the Mississippi Way of Life is not tolerated for a Negro or white.
- 2) Projects of the size of those of the last three summers (100 to 150 workers) are rendered ineffective quickly by police threats and detention of members.
- 3) Previous projects have gotten no national publicity on the crucial issue of voting rights, and hence, have little national support either from public opinion or from the Federal Government. A large number of students from the North making the necessary sacrifices to go South would make abundantly clear to the government and the public that this is not a situation which can be ignored any longer, and would project an image of cooperation between Northern and white students and Southern Negro students to the nation which will reduce fears of an impending race war.
- 4) Because of the lack of numbers in the past, all workers in Mississippi have had to devote themselves to voter registration, leaving no manpower for stop-gap community education projects which can reduce illiteracy drastically as well as raise the level of education of Negroes significantly. Both of these activities are, naturally, essential to the project's emphasis on voting.
- 5) Bail money cannot be provided for jailed workers; hence, a large number of students going South would prevent the project from being halted in its initial stages by immediate arrests. Indeed, what will probably happen in some communities is the filling of jails with civil rights workers to overflowing, forcing the community to realize that it cannot dispense with the problem of Negroes' attempting to register simply by jailing "outsiders."

Why this summer?

Mississippi at this juncture in the Movement has received too little attention---that is, attention to what the state's attitude really is---and has presented COFO with a major policy decision during the last months. Either the civil rights struggle has to continue there as it has for the past few years, with small projects continuing to work in selected communities with no real progress on any fronts, or the Movement must concentrate on

confronting Mississippi with a representative task force of such a size as to force either the state and municipal governments to change their social and legal structures, or the Federal Government to intervene on behalf of the constitutional rights of its citizens. The first alternative, in one sense, could mean continuing deaths, beatings, with no real progress resulting, since a complete withdrawal and abandonment from the state is unthinkable for anyone who has seen its conditions and experienced the terror of its police state atmosphere.

Since 1964 is an election year, the clear-cut issue of voting rights should be brought out in the open. Many SNCC field secretaries in Mississippi hold the view that Negroes will never vote in large numbers until Federal marshals and troops intervene. At any rate, many Americans must be made to realize that the voting rights they so often take for granted involve considerable risks for Negroes in the South. In the larger context of the national civil rights movement, enough progress has been made during the last year so that there can be no turning back. Major victories in Mississippi, recognized as the stronghold of racial intolerance in the South, would immeasurably speed the breaking-down of legal and social discrimination in both North and South.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

In the current issue of "nation" magazine, Martin Luther King explains that this spring and summer will be the time of massive and definitive action in Southern voter registration. And he explains that students have been and must be the backbone of this work: they have the freedom from other responsibilities, they have physical endurance, and they are committed to their role in the historical force of our time that we label "The American Negro Revolution."

This summer Northern students in the hundreds and thousands will be needed in Mississippi for voter registration work, for teaching in "freedom schools," for working in community centers.

This summer's work in Mississippi is sponsored by COFO, the Council of Federated Organizations, which includes the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the NAACP, as well as Mississippi community groups. The project will be operating on several levels, each of which demands staffing by different groups:

- 1) Voter Registration--- This is the most concentrated level of activity, of the close to 50% of Mississippi's voters. This is the one area of activity in which the Justice Department can be completely active in following up every complaint, in attempting to offer protection. For this work, students do not need any special skills; men are preferred. Although all students will be trained, those who have had previous experience with civil rights work in the South are particularly needed. Students will be placed in towns all over the state. They will room with Negro families and at various organization headquarters. Board costs will average \$8 per week. Students are needed for this, as well as for other portions of the summer work, who can stay in Mississippi a minimum of three weeks; the work will continue throughout the summer.
- 2) Freedom Schools--- Several continuing, 8 hour per day schools will be established throughout the state teaching everything from reading to accounting, art to typing. The nature and breadth of the program will be determined by the skills of those people volunteering for work. Students with specific skills are urgently needed. High school teachers are being recruited through the American Federation of Teachers (AFT); recruitment of high school and university faculty by students is also helpful.
- 3) Community Centers--- These will be established in every community in which they are requested by the Negro leadership. The last COFO meeting indicated wide response among the Negro leadership. The community centers will feature programs ranging from arts and crafts to dancing, music, Negro and American history, home

economics. Once again students---as well as faculty---with specific skills and interests are needed. While men are preferable for voter registration work, the Freedom Schools and Community Centers involve specific skills and need anyone who has them, men or women.

- 4) Clergy---The National Council of Churches is bringing down a large number of clergy. Campus clergy should certainly be alerted to this activity, and may contact the National Council of Churches or forward their inquiries through the Stanford Civil Rights Secretariat.
- 5) University Faculty---While students are needed for a minimum stay of three weeks in Mississippi, programs and projects are arranged so that faculty may make a direct and strong contribution even if only available for several days to a week. National faculty recruitment is still being organized. Faculty should become aware now of the general projects in Mississippi; we will forward any requests for information and will send you information about specific faculty projects as soon as it is available.
- 6) Lawyers--- Recruitment and organization of lawyers for the summer work is being organized by several attorneys in New York. Lawyers in our community and in the University law school (students and faculty) should be contacted; requests for information may temporarily be forwarded through the Stanford Civil Rights Secretariat. We will supply you with detailed project information and/or addresses for direct contact as soon as they are made available to us.
- 7) Fund Raising--- During the mock election for Aaron Henry in Mississippi last November, Stanford was able to send off \$1000 a day for the entire school week after several Stanford and Yale students left campus to help in the last crucial days of this campaign. The need for funds---for equipment, books, clerical expenses, press services, travel, etc.---is vast. The Stanford faculty was particularly responsive during the fund drive for the mock election. Stanford fund raising will center around the appearance of Martin Luther King this spring quarter at our Western States Civil Rights Conference. Individual students who need help for transportation expenses (set up car pools), or expenses while in Mississippi (Jackson estimated \$75 as the average expense for a 6-7 week stay), should approach home-town or university community churches, Temples or organizations, etc. The financial needs are vast; in addition to the working expenses of the project, there is the ever-present problem of bail funds.

The project is seen as a response to the Washington March and an attempt to assure that in the Presidential Year 1964 all American citizens are given the franchise. The students at work on the project are neither working at odds with the federal government nor at war with the state of Mississippi. The federal government is completely aware of all plans, and the Justice Department will offer all possible protection. The impetus is not against Mississippi, but for the right to vote, to have the ability to read, the aspirations and the training to work. The training and available time of students make us perhaps the one single group who can form the bulwark of such a massive project.

Stanford's Role:

The role of Stanford students in this summer's work is manifold. This role, it should be made clear, is that of individual students---during summer vacation---not of any "official backing." Mr. Glover explained recently that when "Shriver comes to the campus, he is welcomed and is able to make available all information on the Peace Corps recruiting. If there were someone against the Peace Corps, we'd have him come to speak too. Stanford has not 'taken a stand', or said that it is officially 'for the Peace Corps'; we just welcome information about the Peace Corps onto the campus." It is precisely in this context that ASSU will act for summer projects. The only involvement of the ASSU as a body will be to respond to the immense interest demonstrated by the student body during the November "Mock Election" by making available all information about summer projects. The Stanford YWCA has met some of the need by handling applications and serving as a clearing house for a myriad of spring and summer work camp programs and the like. By serving as an information center in the same way for other projects, ASSU both responds to the interests of its membership and assures more responsible placement of students in jobs, will keep students aware of legal implications and attempt to assure they are adequately knowledgeable and trained for the work in which they will engage.

The amount of information demanded by Stanford students of work camp and Southern Civil Rights projects, and the response to this by such groups as YWCA and ASSU is an affirmation of the relevance of the educational process in which we are engaged to the confrontation of the social and ethical questions of our time. These projects are in no way in opposition to this educational process, but are the result of it.

Because of the broad nature of campus interest in the summer project, as demonstrated in November, and in light of the number of Stanford students who have worked in the South already, Stanford has been afforded direct access to information and planning from those in Mississippi. This information will be relayed to all other West Coast schools; Yale is serving the same co-ordinating function on the East Coast along with Harvard and Oberlin. On this coast, plans are currently under way for Oregon and Pomona to organize in the same way Stanford has, in order to co-ordinate their areas. There is no doubt that students, in the vast numbers of which Martin Luther King spoke in the last issue of "Nation", will be in Mississippi this summer. But whether they will have a realistic picture of conditions and dangers there, of the nature of their role, of legal concomitants, etc., depends upon the responsibility assumed in the dispensing of information by such groups as ASSU. To paraphrase Mr. Glover, ASSU is not "taking a stand" but is welcoming and facilitating the dispensing of information both as a service to and in protection of students who want to work in the South this summer.

The co-ordination of the Mississippi project will be alongside that of the Stanford Spring Civil Rights Conference for the Western states. Martin Luther King will appear on campus at that time. The gathering of students from the Western states at Stanford will form a focal point for the dispensing of information on the Southern teaching projects, proper training for voter registration workers as well as those who will be teaching in Freedom Schools and working in community centers, etc. The challenge to Stanford students includes work in developing lesson plans, teaching methods, training centers, etc.

The involvement of Stanford students holding positions of leadership is, other than working with the information center, that of individuals. It is obvious that many students holding representative positions at Stanford are deeply committed personally to these projects, and in many cases where their official stand is one of welcoming information, their personal views are those of commitment and urgency. It is in this latter context they act only as individuals and not as representatives.

Liabilities and Assets of Student Participation in Southern Civil Rights Activity

Assets:

- 1) A project of this size can only be carried out with the co-operation of Northern students. Martin Luther King has said of the project, "I'm thinking now in terms of thousands and thousands of people. They would have to be students, mainly because for financial reasons, working adults find it difficult to remain in jail."
- 2) Rev. King has said elsewhere that even a white student in the South who does nothing more than stand in the streets with his guitar is making a significant contribution in that he is preventing alliances in the Movement from becoming racial. The term "race war" is overused, and its relevance is moot, but to whatever extent this fear exists in many Americans' minds, it must not be a superfluous obstacle to concern with participation in the Movement.
- 3) White faces are at first feared by many Mississippi Negroes. Once this initial barrier is overcome, however, the moral support and concern of American students ignites a spark of hope in many communities, and ends the tremendous feeling of isolation or alienness and loneliness in their plight which is easily understandable.
- 4) The white Northern student, inadvertently perhaps, gives additional strength to those native white Mississippians who recognize the need for social change, but who are still too timid to speak out in their "closed society."

Liabilities:

- 1) The possibility of receiving physical harm and even death is always a real and present one. At least four lives have been given in the struggle so far, and numerous near misses have occurred. Physical harm from police is as likely as harm from Citizens' Council members.

This situation lends itself to romanticizing when one is far from the state and hasn't experienced the day by day terror and tension of continually being followed, never knowing when a cold Mississippi jail will be one's next stopping place---nor for how long. There are endless accounts of the atrocities that occur in and out of jail; suffice it to say that it doesn't take long for this atmosphere to become very unromantic and oppressive.

- 2) Individual plans for future education and employment should be considered along with the possibility of acquiring a police record. For example, several state law school students have agreed to do anything in the Movement except go to jail, which in some cases may affect Bar admissions.
- 3) Jail sentences are not always calculable, and it is possible that one may not be able to follow one's itinerary in Mississippi or even leave the state when one may wish. If arrested and convicted, one desires to appeal a decision, return to the state for subsequent trials may be necessary.
- 4) The discipline of non-violence is not easy. Unless your conviction, either philosophical or tactical, has been tested, then serious thought must be given to your temperament. All the participating civil rights action group assume that this discipline will be observed at all times.
- 5) As a Northern educated student, you may at times feel superior in judgment to those under whom you will be operating, simply because many have been denied equal educational opportunities. It should be noted that Northern students will be involved in the project at the invitation of the action groups, and while the opportunity to shape decisions is always open, one must realize that leadership will not be in the hands of summer participants in Mississippi.