

Bob and Dave --

August, 1963

Look -- there's one dead damn straight fact: if y'all die, the movement dies. Dave most. This is no Albany. You have not walked into an extinct volcano, but a rumbling heaving mass. The kids may be in school, but they are not finished, the parents -- not many of them sucked it up to begin with but those who did will remain ready till they die.

Some things about Americus

1. The SCM is run entirely differently from the Albany M. Main difference is individualism. There are no weeping sessions at mass meetings, nor any wild and fantastic plans, prayers, hopes or schemes propounded for the disillusioned to clap and amen to. The truth is stated and then boom, someone will take it from there and you'll hear -- if you listen -- what the folks want. To get back to individualism. I never heard anyone in Americus "but what if..." with the idea in their mind what if I wind up in jail lose my house job restaurant etc. For my implication they are expected to do all this, not only by us, but by the strong kids and a few parents who are with us. And they are expected to suffer without whimpering. The reasons they expect and are expected to act this way are at least 3

1) Don. Don is a big prick and everyone in town knows it. He is not the kind soft-hearted mother Sherrod is, but rather the father who holds an unsparing rod. Folks who go and cry to papa do not get a shoulder to cry on. They are told that they can fall like babies or stand up like men and women.

2) There are strong folks in Americus -- Amanda Bowen, Sammy Mahone, James Carter -- a slew of others ready to demonstrate plus leaders like Mary Kate Belle, Rev. Campbell (and more should be being thrashed out of the bushes all the time -- Rev. Freeman, Rev. Thomas, Battle and Jordan from Albany --) Many, many more.

3) Americus is a small town. Word spreads fast. You can cover the whole town in one day and let every black in town know what you've said.

4) The movement has not yet developed favorites -- neither favorite families nor favorite girl ~~fix~~ friends nor favorite anybody beyond question. Everyone should know that if there is something to be done we is the one to do it, not them. "When are we going to demonstrate" is the term, not "when are you-all or when are they going to demonstrate."

5) Americus is much more along lines of middle class America, where the ordinary man or woman does not take crap because a whole system of values tells them they will be cowards if they do. There is much less head scratching yessah junk and much more backtalk than in Albany.

6) This is a county movement. There are 4 cities in Sumter County besides Americus. The outlying areas will have to be run much more along Sherrodian mother-type lines than Americus (I think) but they should be run.



So what do you do?

1) take that god damn Constitution article and read it at a mass meeting, then rip the hell out of it and let the people know they are not beaten, finished, dead, or even struck.

2) throw out pickets, at least at the theatre, and better on every block. It's legal to picket between 9 - 5 with an hour out for lunch you know.

3) keep talking like the people are expected to demonstrate, and like they can look nowhere, but nowhere - not to God, not to government, not to Albany ~~and~~ nowhere but to themselves to get things done.

4) my idea of stepped up voter registration is about 10 to 20 people per day, canvassing every afternoon, more SNCCs up here to work. DeSoto, Cobb, Andersonville, Plaines -- plus plans to run somebody for mayor, sheriff, and every damn thing next year. Sherrod will jail 30 SNCCs in Albany but won't send but 2 to Americus. Atlanta will call the whole staff throughout the country to readiness over Greenwood or Danville, but nothing in Americus but a dinky plan for some future foolishness at Andersonville -- which will probably fall through. This is our bitch. Where the hell have SNCCs guts gone to.

5) where the hell do you guys hang out anyhow? None seems to know you. Do you play pool, go to cafes, dances, mass meetings, etc? None of that is illegal here, you know. No Sherrodian moralisms. I even had a couple quasi-dates here at one time.

6) Where are you living. If you've moved back out to the farm, no wonder the people are ready to retreat. The moving back to the farm would indicate to them that you had retreated. You'all should be living in town, working in town - everything right out in the open, right under the cops' noses, and lookin' mean as hell at them every time they ask for it. If they arrest you, dig baby, we'll be glad to have you.

Maybe I'm all wet. Maybe the 150 or so people I got to know in Americus and Sumter County have all turned out to be punks. But I don't think so.

7) If the "leadership" falters, grab the reins. Deac. Evans faltered long ago. Barnum hasn't stacked up quite as good as hoped. Imagine he still grabs his bottle and leaves 4 days out of every 2 weeks. But you have Campbell etc. and all the other preachers who should be being drawn in. Go visit them. Ask em what to do, make them feel important invite them to meetings and call on them to speak. No harm even in y'all being a couple of big pricks and taking over at times yourselves. Sometimes you can't work with the SCM. Sometimes you gotta get behind it and kick it.

Glad to hear the "boss" is away. He does need it. Did he ever come up here? What did he say to the people? Did he tell them they were finished or that they should go home ~~and~~ and cry for a while?



8) What about a voter registration parade Greenwood style? Bet the courthouse still isn't open on Saturday morning. A petition was handed in on that, signed by hundreds of Sumter County voters and would-be voters, months and months ago. No reply. J.D. came down and said they had a right to close up on 1/2 day per week. But Saturday? Some day they should be made to change the day. That's voter registration men. Well protected under all forms of law, etc. Sheriff start beating people for standing waiting to register on a Saturday morning and he's hung (maybe).

9) For Chrissake, when reporters come to town take them around to some militant blacks. Did they talk with y'all? Give them hell. What's this about a 1/2 hearted boycott. Where's the "stepped up v-r".

And I know there are some beautiful, grim, determined, un-beaten people out there. There are also still people to be got. This movement is a mere infant still to grow. I don't know, men. Like I said, I could be all wet. But somehow it seems to me that Americus has always been more honest than Albany, and I just can't believe that those folk out there have lied to the point where they want to cave in now.

Don't quite know what to give you as historical background to go on. When I was here, Don and I worked it sort of this way: Canvassing during the afternoons for V-r or just plain jiving meeting new people - basketball, little meetings, canvassing, canvassing, canvassing, football, workshops, trips to the farm, canvassing. ~~xxx~~ Don's the jock but even I could take my shirt off.

And a lot of ~~time~~ time spent in people's houses and making appointments to get in people's houses where we would nail them, both of us, both barrels, driving hard. And when I ran out of words, Don had some more and me more after him. This still needs to be done. You can map out action (demonstrations - trips to courthouse for v-r etc.) in five minutes. But people still need to be confronted personally. And they will be honest by and large. If Rev. Freeman says he's going to be at mass meeting he'll make it. If Rev. Thomas says same, he'll at least send his wife. And these kids - I only know one - outside of them you can tell by looking, that is. They will not let you down.