

[17]
Exerpts from letters sent by Richard Swanson to his parents.

Half way through orientation and I am very enthused about the "feeling" which is here. When I send for money send it as a money order in registered mail, that way we can explain if Mississippi people stop it. I will be teaching history and recreation. Have met some great people.

The Negro must get his rights, the white mind of the south must be changed. I am teaching Negro history and social studies. The facilities for the school are a three story brick building, fifty students, we hope for more but mostly they are afraid to attend. I am living with a boy named Pete, he is a Jewish boy from New York who attends the University of Chicago. We live at the home of a Negro family whose name is Smith. Mrs. Smith is very good at cooking grits and every thing else.

The school is going well, the tension is still strong, we have created a strong and good relation with the kids. I will be coach of school base ball team, we will play other Freedom School teams around the state.

The summer project is going well, I hope I can return next summer, perhaps interest some of my friends back home. The project plans to expand next summer.

Last nite I went with George Smith, a Negro boy, to freedom registration. This type of activity seems so much more alive, this is a chance to meet the people of Mississippi and talk with them over their problems concerning their freedom and their desire for their rights.

There has been a stronger push in the last few weeks to increase the number of people who are entered in the Freedom Democratic Party. It is very slow and discerning work for the voter registration people who work very hard and still cannot get many of the Negroes to register. Many Negroes are afraid to challenge the white mans hold on things. But the attitude is changing and hopefully soon the conditions will change.

I am working at the Cofo office and am splitting the evening watch with Pete whom you will read about in the newspaper article. Mrs. Smith (family I live with) lost her job yesterday, she was fired from her domestic job because she was working on helping the white Civil Rights workers. She could just as easily been fired for going to the polls. The white's have a strong hold on the Negroes, it has slowed the Civil Rights Project down considerably.

The leader of the summer project is Bob Moses, he is as great a person as I have ever seen, soft spoken but very strong in his convictions and very effective. I am very sure that what is being done is right but it should have been done sooner. The Negroes do not want special privileges only equality. Many do not want to socialize with the whites because they think the whites can never like them. I hope the attitude of the white and Negro can harmonize soon.

I like Mississippi but is culturally barren, the two races have nothing to do, no wonder football is so big down here.

When will the white man learn that no one is free until all men are free. We are all in bondage until all have their freedom.

Dick had a weekly interview over a local radio station, the following are excerpts from the tapes that the station was kind enough to send us.

We are isolated from the white community for security reasons--one third of the population in Meridan is Negro--no white students have come to the Freedom School in Meridan--whites yell at us, often using profanity--in reference to fact that we are here to help the Negro--we are frequently followed by people, to the office, where we live--many of the cars are without license plates--there is danger of going into town--they like us to cut down on security risks--it is difficult to talk the white man out of his views, it is wiser to concentrate on helping the Negro--the school has 200 in attendance, it fluctuates from day to day, the threat of not being able to attend the regular school or teachers being denied their positions is ever present. emphasis is being placed on freedom registration--delegates will be chosen who will attend Atlantic City convention and challenge the all white delegation--the Negro who registers to vote has fear of reprisals--a lone Negro is not so apt to meet with violence, it is when the group appears and it looks like more of a threat to the white man-- the

Negro is afraid to demonstrate--he is learning the importance of the vote--their meetings have been open to both white and Negro--all white precinct meetings were closed to the Negro--often they were held in secret or the meeting place would be changed--economic reprisals would result against the Negro, he would lose his job which is very precious to him since jobs are few and very inferior--attempts to test the Civil Rights bill will be made by the people who live here not by the workers--white reactions are expected--many whites thought the disappearance of the three students was a hoax and if not they got what they deserved--editorials in some of the papers stated that the Civil Rights workers were unshaven, unwashed, communist dupes etc.--urged a Baptist Church to open a private school to fight integration--students in the rural areas use cars that will not break down and to get out as fast as possible when necessary--four people to a car, no Negroes--white delegation will back Goldwater although they will attend the convention and act as if they intended to back Johnson--

Goldwater is the name you read in white newspapers--newspapers and TV programs do not editorialize, leave important things out--we have very little contact with the whites, try not to antagonize--called beatniks, climbed out of garbage cans--we have been told to be conservative in dress, no fancy hair do's for the girls or long hair for the boys--in no way make an exhibition out of self--our purpose is to educate--schools will be continued, not as regular schools but to sublimate, evening classes are being planned--few whites have visited Freedom Schools--not attempt to integrate but to educate--it has been stated that white students will be paid by the government to attend private schools--constantly called things in street--telephone calls are made at all hours, cars group in front of homes where Civil Rights workers are living--

Meridan is safer (relatively) than some other areas--I say prayers for the others if this is safer--the press is ready to cover any explosion which may occur at any time--the real heroes are the students who will be staying after we leave--the finding of the three bodies incited anger on the part of the Civil Rights workers--the Negro boy was from Meridan--a memorial service is being planned for the three--no violence is expected, not by the Negroes at any rate--the three murders was the sad high point of the summer, possibly it made it safer for the rest of the Civil Rights workers, what a price to pay and the pity is that this all happens with in your own country--was refused service at a Dairy Queen today, called a "white nigger"--one store constantly threatened the workers, came out with chains etc.--F B I put a stop to it--picked up for speeding, was going under thirty miles in a thirty mile zone--two white boys and a Negro were with me--the students were sent out of the room while I was being questioned, this is so there will be no witnesses--policeman struck my arm when I leaned over to look at the book to find out what I was being held for--I also was booked for reckless driving but this was later stricken from the record--

Dick also was interviewed outside the convention hall, this appeared on a local TV station.

I was refused service at a Dairy Queen to-day, I was with three Civil Rights workers and a Negro, we were called "white niggers" and told to leave the premises.

I was arrested for reckless driving and speeding. One Negro boy and three white students were in the car with me at the time, we were on our way home from the play field. I was going less than thirty miles an hour in a thirty mile zone and definitely not speeding being reckless. We were taken to the police station, all were sent out of the room but myself, this is so there will be no witnesses. The officer hit me when I leaned over to read in his book why I was being arrested. You do not report an incident such as this because this is going on continuously.

The constant harrassment is a reminder that we are not wanted down here and that at any time some thing can happen. You try not to think about the danger but go on with your work.

The Negroes that I have had contact with are bright and eager to learn, they have the potential if given a chance. The new buildings are beautiful but facilities lacking and inferior. The whites point with pride at the structures and deny the lack of equipment.

Although only two delegates from the Freedom Party were seated at the convention I feel that progress has been made, for the first time the Negro from Mississippi will have a voice in shaping the politics of our country. The Negro has been patient long enough, he must be given what he has deserved for so long, equality.