

Report from Hattiesburg  
July 14-24 1964

A brief account of the activities for the week follows.

At least 30 persons went down to the courthouse this week with no incident. Four precinct meetings for the Freedom Democratic Party have been set up for next week with the help of the block captains. They will be publicized by a legal notice in the paper and possibly spot announcements on two radio stations.

Attendance has stayed constant at the six freedom schools. They are publishing mimeographed newspapers. Art, music, science, French and recreational programs have begun. The schools are competing in making posters for the precinct meetings. The community center in Palmers Crossing is painted, curtains are hung and the grand opening is scheduled for today.

Grand jury refused to indict Jimmy Jones on rape charge. Milton Hancock's perjury case was removed.

There has been an increase in workers who have to pay traffic fines. Some cars are stopped half a dozen times a week.

A couple of threatening phone calls have been reported by local people. One complaint was filed with the FBI.

Seven freedom school students and three teachers wrote letters to the chief of police asking why no one has been arrested for last week's beating. One of the students was taken to headquarters with her mother and told that she could be arrested for "threatening" the chief. She was not booked. One teacher was taken to headquarters and asked about factual details of her letter, but she had no new information and the interview (with Herring) was brief.

The same constable who slapped Malcolm Zaretsky two weeks ago followed a girl to the home where she is staying and threatened her and the guy who was driving her home with arrest for "cohabitation." Also threatened the lady the girl was staying with. This particular constable delights in shining spotlights in people's windows, etc. One complaint about him has already been made to sheriff. The individuals involved say he was drunk.

On July 20, Peter Werner, 25, a college student teaching in the Freedom Schools was attacked and beaten on Main Street in downtown Hattiesburg just after noon. He and a white girl and a Negro boy were shopping for supplies for the school. They were entering a drug store when Pete, last in line was grabbed and hit and then kicked in the head. He made no resistance or retaliation. Police booked him and his assailant for assault and battery, freed both on \$25 bond, and the case come up for disposition today.

My case is still pending. The grand jury met a week ago to hear the facts in my case. Our lawyers have been trying since to find out whether or not the jury returned an indictment. No word. The authorities here take the position that the results cannot be divulged. We feel, however, that they have very likely dropped the case.

We have had a "crew" of about 17 here for more than a week now, at the Ministers' Project. We really move forward with such a staff. Each day we send canvassers to work with the COFO and college workers canvassing in four areas. We have a steady program of white community contact work going on. We have contacted all but a few of the ministers now. We have 30 and more contacts at SMU. More and more, people call on the phone, seeking us out, eager to let us know they are "with" us. None of this should be construed as meaning that we have general community support, through. Nor do most of these people take an open stand on our side as yet. But with the rapid increase in contacts, more timid people are taking courage and making the first, tentative moves toward authentic involvement.

July 18, we all attended the gala opening of the Community Center in Palmers Crossing. What a sight! A newly painted building surrounded by a spacious play area thronging with happily shouting, running, singing, playing children. And many adults too...singing to the strumming of Joe

Harrison's able guitar playing. And free food for everyone!

Now we are pointing all efforts toward the precinct meetings of the Freedom Democratic Party to be held this Saturday at 4 p.m. Home meetings, canvassing, card catalogues, roll playing the way a precinct meeting works, ...every effort being made to make this event as closely parallel to the State Democratic process as possible.

A word should be said about the excellent help coming from lawyers who have volunteered a week of time for Mississippi. These men come under the auspices of several organizations and serve as legal advisors, investigators, and counsel for those who need help. Needless to say, they are almost always busy somewhere in the state.

A bit of clarification about our summer volunteers: a quarter of them are not college students. Rather, they are professional educators. Some teach college courses, others are high school educators. They add an element of maturity and experience which when coupled with the zest, skill and courage of the college students, creates a suburb team.

The SMU students who I mentioned in the last letter have continued in dialogue. One of them spent an evening at one of the Freedom Schools. This is a really courageous thing to do since if he were discovered, he might be suspended or dropped.

We continue to enjoy the hospitality of John Cameron...especially the Saturday afternoon and evening at the farm. What wonderful respite in the midst of tension! John himself has been extremely busy. His church has been host to the 87th annual session of the First Enterprise Sunday School and Baptist Training Union Congress, July 22-24. Beyond that, he must leave soon to travel to Iowa where his wife has had her vacation interrupted by the necessity for major surgery in connection with an ulcer condition. In the midst of all this, John still finds time to meet with our groups of volunteers to give them "home front" insight into the complexities of the situation.

News Flash! One of our ministers have stayed at the home of a woman in Palmers Crossing, shelling peas in order that she might feel free to go to the Court House to take the registration test! As the car was leaving to take people in this morning, she demurred indicating all the peas that had to be shelled before they spoiled. Thus, the situation developed. Word is that about 12 went in to take the test this morning. This is a typical day.

A word about state-wide activities follows: Although we appreciate the many one-week volunteers who are coming to Mississippi, it should be emphasized that the really urgent need still is for people who can give three or more weeks to the work. These people ought to communicate with Rev. Warren McKenna, 307½ Parish Street, Jackson, Miss. tel-355-9091. Those who can stay for several weeks are used in the "minister-counselor" program. Although the job must remain loosely defined because of the wide variety of situations encountered through the state, several things can be said. Minister-counselors engage in a ministry to the volunteers. They live among them, work with them, and relate to them. They get an opportunity to embody an entirely different image and approach toward "church." This new image is characterized by the mystified and admiring words of college students here who say, "None of the ministers I knew at home were like you fellows here." Relevance...that is what is embodied here.

Those on the scene this week: Rabbi Dan Litt, Walter Gravatt, Duane Day, and Solomon Jacobs from Cleveland. George Earl Owen, Jack Keppel and Doris Rossman from Indianapolis. Barber Kremer of Philadelphia, Burke Dorworth, Maryland. Robert J. Allison from Ft. Collins, Colo. Don Fletcher, Austin, Texas; Jack and Peg Porter from Bloomington, Ill.; Sally Smith and Mary Ellen LaRue from Iowa; F. Norman Totten, Newton, Mass.; A. Stauffer Curry, Elgin, Ill.; Herb McKinstry and Barret Rudd from State College, Pa.; and Winifred Lomas, Bessemer, Mich. 12 (2)

Churches represented: Episcopal, Reformed Jewish, United Church of Christ, Disciples, Presbyterian, Methodist, Church of the Brethern, and a professional athiest.

Keep us in your prayers. Join us when you can.

Bob Beech, Co-Director with  
John Cameron. Hattiesburg Ministers'  
Project