

Report from Hattiesburg
July 24- August 3

These here since last report: John P. Crossley, Jr., Hastings, Neb.; Al Ronander and Mary Lou Pettit of Philadelphia, Rabbi Jerome Lipnick, Minneapolis; George Pontikes, Chicago; Theo Fisher and F. W. Wiegmann of Indianapolis; E. Van Kranenburg, Des Plaines, Ill.; Bishop Paul Moore, Washington, D.C.; Michael Starr, Stanford, Conn.; George Kehm, Pittsburgh; Jitsue Merikawa, King of Prussia, Pa.; John Baumgartner, Warren, Michigan, Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld, Cleveland. Faiths and Denominations: United Church of Christ, Conservative Rabbinical Assembly of America, Reformed Jewish, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Disciples, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, U.S.A., and American Baptist Convention.

Let's begin on a political note this week. As you know, the Freedom Democratic Party is moving into high gear in its effort to challenge the Mississippi Democratic Party's right to be seated at the National Convention in Atlantic City. Precinct, county and district meetings have been held. Those of us who have sat as observers in these assemblies have caught anew the original intent and spirit with which our democratic processes were founded. Words utterly fail to catch the feelings one has at watching people deprived of rights we take for granted, stand up with pride to nominate someone for an office...or to advance a resolution. Many of us, used to the callous manner in which parliamentary procedure is often used to railroad through a pre-planned program in organizations to which we belong, feel ashamed and humble watching the sensitive and just way in which the same procedure is used to bring true consensus of opinion to fruition. Why the FDP? Will it get seated? The party was organized to protest--

1. The long history of systematic and studied exclusion of Negro citizens from equal participation in the political processes of the state.
2. The Mississippi Dem. Party's lack of loyalty to the National Democratic Party.
3. The intransigent and fanatical determination of the State's political power structure to maintain the status-quo.

Whether or not the FDP is seated at Atlantic City, the nation's attention will be focused on the evils which exist here. This exposure of the situation will be well worth all the effort that has been expended. What can you do? There is still time to talk to your state's representatives to the Democratic convention in Atlantic City. They need to know how you feel. They need to know that some of their own people support the FDP seriously.

Public accommodations: COFO has kept its word. No testing of public accommodations has been sponsored as a part of the Summer Project. However local citizens, acting on their own initiative, have tested some facilities. Woolworth and Kress lunch counters are now serving Negroes in Hattiesburg. One drug store closed its lunch counter rather than serving Negroes. Other lunch counters and movie theaters have turned the Negroes away. So far there has been no violence as a result of these encounters.

The newest arm of the Miss. Summer Program is the medical team. Throughout the state, teams of physicians and nurses and technicians are checking to see that local facilities are providing adequate medical care. Also, these people enter into dialogue with their Miss. colleagues on the medical ramifications of equality. I can vouch personally that these "medicine men" have magic that works. Dr. Brenner, a psychiatrist assigned to Hattiesburg, ministered to me at a time of need. I had a blister on my foot. I observed that my illness was at the wrong end of the body for his specialty. He treated me anyway (with salve and bandage). The infection was gone in a day and the pain almost immediately. Either this guy is great or mine was one of the few psychosomatic cases of a blister on the foot recorded to date!

The COFO library is coming of age. We now have a "lunch library" in Palmer's Crossing. Space is still a problem. We have more books than shelves. WE URGENTLY NEED SOMEONE WITH PROFESSIONAL LIBRARY SKILLS here to help. People like this duck in and out and their help is wonderful. But we still need more. Somewhere, one of you know

someone who can spend a week with the books here in Hattiesburg.

Incidents of harrassment and intimidation by local citizens continue unchecked. Bottles and beer cans are thrown from cars at canvassers. So far, with the exception of Rabby Lelyveld's beating, none of these have resulted in conflict.

The work in Hattiesburg will not end on August 30, as previously thought. The form is to change (more about that in a later report) the sponsorship may change slightly, the program may broaden, but the work will continue and we will need volunteers on into the Fall and Winter. Once again, we emphasize the need for laymen and women. This is the Church's ministry...not just the cleric's ministry.

In connection with this on-going program, the Beech family is moving to Hattiesburg. We're looking for a house now, talking about the school situation, looking forward to renewing friendships begun this summer.

John Cameron is still in Iowa with his wife and family. She is recovering satisfactorily from an ulcer operation. John will be back this Friday, ready to take the helm.

I will spend the balance of this week in Batesville, Miss., helping to begin a new NCC project there. Batesville, you remember, is significant because it is in that county the questions on the voter registration form dealing with the constitution and its interpretation have been ruled unfair and eliminated. The effort there is to show that, given fair conditions, Negroes are able and willing to register in large numbers.

Rabbi Lelyveld of Cleveland came back down Monday to appear before the grand jury as a state's witness in the beating he sustained. Following the interrogation before the jury, he stated that he was not sure who had been the guilty party. He was treated very rudely and asked a number of completely irrelevant questions. The same kind of treatment was given Larry Spears, one of the college volunteers who was attacked.

One of the most exciting and rewarding new developments is the weekly get-together for local white citizens and some of the CCFO staff, Freedom School students, and/or local Negro citizens. For several weeks, now, one of the local white families has opened their home to us. Several other white families are invited and then we appear with the civil-rights workers and local Negro citizens. Soon, several rooms are humming with pleasant conversation as the people break up into small knots of fellowship. No great strategies are discussed. No momentous decisions are made. But black and white are meeting as persons, sharing thoughts, enjoying one another's company. What far cry from the "blood running in the streets" image the local press kept whining about earlier in the summer.

In closing, here is proof that not all bigots and confused thinkers live in Mississippi: The following editorial appeared in the Harvard and Hebron Herald, in towns of those names in Illinois. "COME HOME, REV. BEECH. It has been our opinion right along that any of us Northerners who attempt to invade Mississippi with the express purpose of explaining the Civil Rights law to colored people are asking for it.

Were the situation reversed, and Mississippians decided to invade Illinois for that or any other specific purpose, we would surely resent it. Rev. Robert Beech, former Hebron pastor and assistant Harvard pastor, had, of course, a perfect "right" to join the integrationists at Hattiesburg. But right and judgment are two different things. The Herald editor recieved three of his "Reports from Hattiesburg" and read them all. After reading them, we still think he was asking for it and are glad that nothing more serious happened to him.

A story in last week's Herald relates his arrest on charges of passing \$225.00 in N.S.F. checks while in Mississippi. Now the good pastor, it turns out did not pass the checks deliberately. The bank account back home was overdrawn, possibly without his knowledge. The law acted and Rev. Beech had to spend the night in the clink until the checks were made good the next day. The Herald news ac-

count did not say that. The reporter obviously did not know it at the time.

There's an article in the current issue of LOOK magazine written by a southerner. It describes the Southerner's feeling toward the Colored as a special type of madness. It ends with the unusual and passionate plea: 'Hurry and help us get rid of this madness.'

We are all American citizens and Illinoisians will have a job of interpreting and complying with the Civil Rights Law in their state, to say nothing of Mississippi. We hope Rev. Beech and others like him come back home before something more serious happens."

Mr. Lowell Nye...editor...this is my reply to you. And please note that several others who read your paper are reading this reply too! First, had you read my Reports from Hattiesburg, you would know that the Summer Volunteers have expressly avoided activities aimed at forcing compliance with the Civil Rights law at an early date. This is because we feel that the political, educational, and social service programs we sponsor are more important right now than any token kind of response to the C.R. law. Second, it is my humble opinion that Mississippi will have solved its race problem and be in a position to send able, sensitive and concerned Mississippians to Illinois just about the time you folks there need them! For if your kind of attitude is indicative, Illinois is going to have a much worse time learning what equality means than Mississippi is having. Third, in two articles and one editorial you still have not yet come close to presenting the bare facts concerning my arrest in Mississippi...not to mention your uncomplimentary interpretation of them. There was no out of state bank involved. The amount of the ONE check written was \$129.95. I was not charged with passing bad checks, but rather with attempting to obtain goods under false pretenses. The bail was not \$2500, but \$2000. I am still out on bail for that charge. The grand jury now sitting may or may not return an indictment. The crime is a felony and if convicted, I would receive up to three years in prison and up to \$1500 fine. Needless to say (to anyone but you) I did not commit the crime. At the time the check was presented at the bank there were sufficient funds there to cover it. The significance of the arrest is that it highlights the extremes to which Mississippi police and courts will go to harass and inhibit our efforts to work toward justice. Fourth, the article you chose to quote from LOOK is an article in support of the efforts now being made to aid the southern Negro in his efforts to achieve full humanity and full citizenship. You have taken the quote out of context and as it stands in your editorial, it only serves to confuse matters. Finally, the job you speak of in Illinois is and has been being done for years. The point you failed to make is that the difference between Illinois and Mississippi is that while Illinois has had civil rights laws on its books for some time that are in many ways more far-reaching than the new C.R. law, Mississippi has laws expressly intended to inhibit the Negro in his exercise of rights. This is why I am in Mississippi now, not in Illinois. However, Mr. Nye, it is good to know that you miss me. I'll take a rain check on your invitation if you please. If five or ten years, you'll probably need me and my fellow Mississippians to give you a few tips on how we achieved equality down here.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Beech, Co-director
with John Cameron
Hattiesburg Ministers' Project