

Field Report--August 5, 1964-- for June 28- July 24
Harriet Tanzman-- Holly Springs, Miss.

I came to Mississippi because its the home of the problems I grew up with, in a northern city, home of poverty and despair and exploitation, and men using one another to "make it" and because I knew that I could contribute within the framework of the summer project, as described to me by SNCC staff members from Jan. on, and in the literature sent to me as an applicant during the late Spring. I chose the Freedom schools to work in because I wanted to reach the teenagers and encourage them to question and participate in trying to overthrow an oppressive system of men keeping men down. I thought the proposed curriculum sounded like it would stimulate questioning, discussion, and finding answers together, teacher and student.

In the course of Oxford, Ohio, listening to Wats line reports, observing the feelings of some of the SNCC staff toward the summer project, ranging from looking forward to it, to skepticism, to dread of the effects of our coming on & reprisals against local Negroes, I found that I lost faith, to some extent, in the role I had set myself, I should have changed to become a specialist and do research, or work in the challenge or on communications, but the personnel staff was very tired in Oxford, and overworked, and I had little information about proposed "specialist" programs, like research, so I just kept to the freedom school idea, and decided to work under Ivanhoe, near the Delta.

I knew nothing about northeast Miss. beforehand, and didn't realize until there that it was a pioneer project in most of the counties, and that the main political organization would have to be done by males. I had wanted to help out with this aspect of the project, since I viewed it as the most important phase-- and tried to work on it all summer, but didn't face the fact that it wasn't very feasible for me to do it in N.e. Miss. at this particular time, even right in Holly Springs, itself, according to my project leaders estimate of the situation there.

We were about 15 freedom school teachers after a week or two, mostly female, the rest were in vr. and fdp and research and nursing and federal aids programs. We did not need quite so many full time teachers, all capable in different ways, ranging in skills to auto mechanics, to art, ~~stamps~~ dance, etc. I feel, and I know that many of us had time which we could have used to read and prepare for classes, in, or help out with the political program. Since, partly by ~~change~~ change, partly by Barbara Walker's belief in spontaneity of organization of freedom school, and Mary Jennings' necessary duties away from the community center in research, I ended up with very young children, and with tutoring, and an occasional class, I had extra time, some of which I used to help with books, some I used to get to know Rust students better, and tell them of what we were doing (which they didn't know, as they were discouraged from visiting the COFO office and the freedom school, ~~at~~ both across the street from the campus). When they return back home this weekend, they should be rather receptive to the local COFO project in their community, since they have been near our project, and have asked a few of us some questions, and seen our play.

I asked Budie~~r~~ unson, who owns and works in a local grocery, to teach sewing to a class of ladies, and also discuss voting with them. She was a seamstress for 20 years in Chicago, and she wants to do this work with us. Her class begins this week, in her home, and will hopefully be the beginning of classes for adults of the Holly Springs community.

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My role in the project became one of tutoring a few teenagers in reading and writing, and working with very young children, storytelling, leading games, sports with whoever was around the freedom school and bored, having the teenage girls show me dances, and teaching them a few folkdances, singing on the lawn of Rust, with whoever wanted to join us, teaching a few classes my last week to young teenagers in nonviolence, history, and talking about myself and themselves. I found the teenage students receptive to complete honesty, to my drawing them out, instead of doing all the talking (which is a bad habit of mine), and a zest for life on the part of the teacher. They enjoyed writing articles for the student newspaper, but not doing just plain writing for the sake of improving grammar(I don't enjoy the latter, either).

Sundays, spent, in churches mostly in counties, was a day to look forward to, of getting to know people. telling them about why we're here, and informing them about the FDP, and getting them to sign-up with the Freedom Regis. form. The Baptist church in Benton county was familiar to me, somehow, with its emotional approach to religion, and its zest for everything-- reminding me of my Hasidic past. We were invited to picnics, lunches, in the midst of a war of armed sides, with SNCC in the middle, trying to act as catalyst to political organization, and participation and leadership by local Negroes in their own futures. Holly Springs arms to protect its friends, against intimidation and violence, be it a night watchman on Rust campus, or 50 local teenagers who jump to the protection of Larry Rubin, when he's threatened. Many white "hoods" are waiting for the sherrif and mayor to take forceful measures against us, in which case they will be free do do some violence, knowing that its sanctioned.

Staying in Rust College dorm was very demoralizing for me-- not because of any physical conditions, but because there was such a gap between the freedom of movement we were allowed, as COFO workers, even just to leave campus to go across the street to the freedom school, and their own restrictions, which were partly in their ~~own~~ own minds. The Dean was very liberal in ideas- especially political and economic, because we had several long talks, and she backs our work. and believes that basically, men need a good living for themselves and their families, and the freedom from fear of outside violence against them, and the right to vote. But she is working in a methoidist college- which believes in restrictions on females, 10:30 curfews, ~~sex~~ etc. The students are feeling the effects of their hospitality, when the mayor orders an investigation of the school for subversion or some such for simply housing us, and supporting our project by so doing. They were sometimes through the summer, quite restricted from visiting us at the COFO office and at the Freedom School, although they were interested. Dorothy Louie became friendly with some of the girls when she came, as I did, and I hope, will retain contact. Three of the guys, Scott. president of Rust, Lee, on the newspaper, and Joe, all plan to work with COFO starting this weekend. Scott already is, and we became close (brother and sister) this summer, in spite of the fact that we both felt quite frustrated by so many COFO people and volunteers living and working together, when he was used to just a few guys and girls organizing, mainly in Holly Springs , itself. I found it difficult to communicate much with the guys on the project, for a few weeks, because we were supposed to keep somewhat reasonable hours, living in the dorms, and they came back from organizing in the counties early evening, write reports, ate malteds(until the farmers gave us vegetables) for dinner, and resented the girls, and Freedom school guys' "soft life" near and on the campus. I became close to some students, especially teenagers(older ones) in the course of the month, to some Rust students, and to a few

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of the staff members on the project. I should have become close to all, but this sometimes takes time, and a relaxed mind, to do, and I spent most of my time with kids, and with Rust students, and some time canvassing, or helping out, to some extent, with sorting books. At night, we all, myself included, attended political meetings in the counties, or were occasionally invited to dinner at someone's house. At the political meetings, I tried to get to know the people, -sing with them, talk with them, and get them to freedom register. My freedom school coordinator, Barbara Walker, didn't stress writing reports as freedom school teachers or comm. center people, so I believe the natural slight gap between an understanding of the work we were doing, and the work that the vr and fdp people were doing was broadened.

I found that I wanted to do too many things, for that particular project I wanted to help to organize adults, just as the freedom school was organizing a nucleus of students, and the teenagers who helped out with voter registration were close to these students (sometimes there was an overlap, and some freedom school students helped out with voter registration). I wanted to sit on porches and talk issues that affect the Negro and white men and women of Miss., and therefore of the whole country, the importance of the challenge, the importance of trying to change to a humanitarian system where man doesn't exploit man, and more specifically, where the man isn't in charge of the lives of the people of Miss., of Marshall County, of Holly Springs. I was told, by Miss. young people who had organized politically, such as Scott, that women had done an effective job along these lines. I knew that it would be more difficult and dangerous for a white female to do it than a Negro female, but I also knew that there were places in Holly Springs, where two white people or a Negro female and a white female could walk around, and organize with big, see buttons on, without a great deal of trouble. I knew that I have established rapport, in the course of the summer, with the Polk sisters, and their father (and when I visited them again, with their mother, and a few of their friends). and this is a prerequisite to organizing-- establishing mutual respect.

I feel that I have accomplished some things, in the course of my stay in Holly Springs-- an evening of 2 hours with Roy DeBerry, 16 year old, drawing him out-- having him do most of the writing of an idealistic note to Rust students about why the death of Medgar Evers meant so much to him, and to the vr and freedom school people who had come south to work for the summer. I established a few contacts in Tippah county, when there in Church, for further organizing, and maybe, someday, the establishment of freedom schools and community centers. I have a firm belief in the beloved institutions we helped to create in Holly Springs, and others worked in in Max Benton County, and I feel that all jobs are important in this war, even child care, occasionally, so that a mother can learn to write--

I feel that now I can contribute by doing several things-- fundraising, working on publicity and information for the Challenge-- from here, the midwest, or the east, and establishing contacts for dreams of coops, schools, etc. in Miss.--contacts in the north of people of money or information or organizing ability. I also feel that I could teach freedom school, although the summer was not one of doing so, for me.

I have learned, over the course of 1 month, a great deal more of what it is to be a white female, who wants to organize, and do everything else, in Miss. at once, and I will do as Cleve says, and stick to one job, avoiding too much daily contact with several bossmen, and with 37 other people. WE SHALL OVE RCOME.