

Report June 21 - August 9

Annie Moody

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I arrived in Canton, Mississippi to work on the voter registration project June 21, 1963. During the period of June 21 and August 9 much has happened in Madison County.

Madison County presents a special and unique case to us, CORE field workers. Here in Madison County there are 29,000 Negroes and only 9,000 whites, with a ratio of 3 to 1 or better. The Negroes here in Madison County own better than 40% of the land beside being in the majority.

Since entering Madison County, we have encountered many problems. They are as follows:

- (1) Fear (of white people)
- (2) Lost of jobs
- (3) Police harrasment
- (4) Illiteracy
- (5) Difficulty in getting people registered
- (6) Trouble in finding housing

I shall discuss the latter in the order given:

"Fear" - The fear we are constantly confronted with is that of our people of the white man. Here in Madison County along with many other areas in Mississippi, this seems an everlasting fear. The kind of fear I am talking about is hard to explain if you have not really experienced it or came into direct contact with it in any sense. The white people in Mississippi maintain this fear through "killing" for a man was killed.

"Shooting" - Since I have been here we, a group of workers were shot at in a car. As soon as our drive got kicked off, five young colored people were shot by a white man as they were

Annie Moody - 2

walking across the railroad track. The man that shot them was fined \$500.00 and pleaded nolo-no contest. He was not charged for shooting the five young people, neither was the fact mentioned in the trial. They only found him guilty of "unlawful use of a fire arm." These are the kind of incidents that keep that "white man firing," and the black man fearing. This makes them fear going to the Courthouse. They also receive threats from the white man when they attempt to register.

"Lost of jobs" - This is something common to this area. There has been a number of people that have lost their jobs because they attempted to register. One lady, Mrs. Mattie (Robinson) Williams, the cook for the county jail, was one that lost her job. She reported that as she was filling out the registration form, the registrar left the office. When he returned, she said that he had the sheriff (Billy Noble) with him. The registrar said to her "Mattie do you know Mr. Noble?" She said, "yes! good evening my Billy." The registrar then said, "Billy, this is our cook at the county jail. Billy Noble (the sheriff) replied, "use to be cook and walked out." She reported that about two hours after she returned home she received her check along with a note saying we cannot use you any more.

There have also been four other people to loose their jobs and many others threatened.

"Police harrassment" - This is a constant threat also. The police are on the job at all hours of the day and night. They first begin harrassing the people by giving them tickets for almost anything as they parked near our office. When they

Annie Moody - 3

expanded their program so much as to attend our meetings at night, standing on the outside in an assembly line distracting attention inside.

One night we had a meeting in the rural at Mount Able Baptist Church whereby they parked in the Church's driveway to check drivers' license. They are always on the scene to interrupt our progress.

Illiteracy and difficulty in getting people registered could be combined. Many of the people here in Madison County are illiterate. The test that's given is hard and the registrar is prejudiced. The people that can hardly write, fear attempting to write or read at all fear the registrar. The registrar, if he has to fill out the form for them, often insults them and flunk them also. It's a tough situation.

Another problem is that of finding somewhere to live. We have all somewhat, been castrated from our people because it's dangerous for them to come live around us. We receive constant threats. Most places we have attempted to live at in the pass, have been raked, shot in or threatened in some form. That is why people around here especially don't want us to live with them. They fear the bombing of their homes. In fact, they fear their lives would be in jeopardy with us around.

> The progress we have made thus far. Through our workshops, canvassing and meeting people in general, we have contacted 4,946 persons here in Madison. We have gotten 275 of that number to go to the Courthouse, 27 persons of that number are now

Annie Moody - 4

registered voters and 188 of the 275 flunked and is still trying to pass with much difficulty.

There were 66 persons out of the 275 that did not get a chance to see the registrar because he refused to open his office on several occasions as well as wasted off time on many occasions, not really getting to but two or three, during the entire day. Sometimes if he was just chatting with a friend he asked them to return the next day. This also discouraged many.

7 Presently in Madison County I have successfully organized a women's auxiliary club on voter registration. We are having meeting from house to house where in each meeting in a different locality, we hope to get more women into the club. They have with success, helped us get people to the Courthouse. Presently I am also in the process of re-organizing the canvassing team.

Through these channels of community along with many others, I hope that the following months that I spend in Canton, Mississippi, in Madison County, will be more prosperous.