

WILLIAM O. SMITH - COLUMBUS PROJECT August 17-21

I spent the first three days traveling with a "roving team" securing Democratic Freedom registration forms in the communities of Aberdeen, Tupolo, and West Point. This gave me an opportunity to build up a relationship with the COFO workers by doing what they were doing, and it also gave me an opportunity to get into many Negro homes and find out their true feelings on the "Southern way of life." This helped me to gain real perspective on the Negro's problem in the South, and to understand why he had to be basically dishonest with the white Southerner. I was also able to observe several occasions of Negroes becoming "Uncle Toms" when they were addressed by white Southerners - they expressed exactly the opposite ideas from what they had just expressed to me!

I next spent the next four days at the request of the lawyer traveling with the legal team to try to bring the witness of the Church into the Southern court-room and jails. This was a most informative and exciting experience. I beheld the futility of the Southern law-man, who was desperately trying to preserve the Southern way of life by corruption and injustice. I saw some of the greatest injustices committed in the name of the church by law enforcement officers. I also had the opportunity to integrate several courtrooms by sitting down on the Negro side.

Finally, I had the opportunity to talk with some of the white aristocracy - clergy, publishers, county clerks, and relatives. I was disowned by relatives in Aberdeen because I was a "freedom rider". I was disillusioned about any solution ever coming to this problem from the white community. I was discouraged with the church - many considered segregation as God's will, and those who considered segregation morally wrong weren't about to do anything about it and rock the boat. I beheld a church that is in bondage to a cultural religion - the Southern way of life is more important to it than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I feel that I had a very well-rounded view of the problems in Mississippi - and I am eager to come back!!