

Charles H. Harper
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REPORT ON SHAW, MISSISSIPPI

Ten days at the COFO center in Shaw has been personally instructive and I hope somewhat helpful to the Summer Project. For the three of us NCC men assigned here for the last week and a half our roles of Pastoral Counselors have been secondary, but perhaps no less significant. We did little in the area of problem counseling for two reasons: (1) the self-sufficient character of the youth with whom we were dealing and (2) the short duration of our stay. On several occasions, however, we had opportunity to discuss religious issues with young people who I'm sure ~~are~~ are among the most sensitive in the nation. Such opportunities arose in the context of being with the young people in their work and play. Any role as counselors arose out of our prior role of the Church being present in the world.

Our stay in Shaw was during the transition period between the Summer Project and the fall program. In this situation we three NCC men inherited a COFO Center with an established program, part of which we continued, taking our directions from Charles Bonds, a local high school boy who is the temporary Project Director in Shaw. However, I came personally to feel that our greatest contribution was not to be made in the children's and youth programs which were so large a part of the Center's life. Thus the three of us turned increasingly to such work as organizing the Center library, making ~~contacts~~ contacts in the white community and working with the adult negro leadership which has been engaged in organizing the Boliver County Improvement Association and a committee to work in the direction of educational improvement and school integration.

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Our contacts in the white community ~~were~~ were cordial but especially encouraging. The one very pleasant exception was the Roman Catholic priest at St. Francis of Assisi Church who has been very courageous in his racial stand and is having an influence in the town. The fact that he is on the Library Board probably accounts for the fact that the library was not closed at the time it was successfully integrated by some of the youth from the COFO Community Center.

In my estimation any contacts that an NCC man can make with the white community is perhaps one of the major contributions ~~we~~ we can make to the Mississippi Project. Obviously the white adult Mississippian is not going to talk much with these "northern beatnik COFO kids." But sometimes these people will talk to an adult dressed in a white shirt and a tie. Such conversation may not result in any dramatic "conversions" but it does keep communication open. This can be a significant contribution in an area where there is all too little honest communication between the races.

While the hope of the Mississippi Negro depends largely on the present day Negro youth who are being better educated than

their parents, yet basic reform in Mississippi cannot be accomplished by a youth movement, either local or "outsiders". The job of social revolution demands in addition to the inspired shock troops of youth, strong adult leadership and considerable financial resources. Perhaps the NCC Delta Ministry can be a small example of what will need to be done in many places across the state.

As a postscript I would add that Mississippi gets in one's blood. If the NCC is looking for additional personnel for the Delta Ministry I would like to discuss with the appropriate persons the possibilities of my becoming involved.

Charles H. Harper
Eliot U. C. C.
474 Centre Street
Newton, Mass. 02158

Quotable Quotes:

"The first nigger to set foot in that white school will get shot."
--A Shaw citizen

"I don't see what y'all can do down here. Our Negroes don't want anything they don't already have." --Shaw merchant to NCC minister

"We teachers have to report each year the organizations to which we contribute. Anyone who reported contributing to the NAACP would lose his job." --A Negro teacher with an M.A. from the University of Chicago

"Anyone that knows anything knows that integration is coming. I just hope it doesn't come too fast." --Mayor of Shaw

"Sure I want to get involved in the school integration effort. What have I got to lose. They've even cut off my welfare check now."
--A mother of four whose husband left several years ago

"A graduate of our high school has no chance of getting into any college outside of the state of Mississippi." --A high school student in Shaw

"Don't tell me you care about my soul if your aren't even concerned with my body." A Negro layman's response to the lack of civil rights involvement on the part of the Negro clergy

"I'm called to preach the Gospel, so I don't become involved in social issues." --White Southern Baptist minister