

Carl and Anne: Jim Dombrowski asked me if I had anything on Miss for publication. I'm too hurried to write something right now. Is there anything in this you can use? It's not been offered for publication. Or if there's time I'll write on theme - "There is fear in the Negro community, and white folk unconsciously what it to stay that way. We were in Miss July 8 to Aug. 10, Irene and I. Greenville. Safest place in COFO. Everett M

Talladega College, Talladega, Alabama
August 28, 1964

Dear Friends:

After a month this summer in Greenville, Miss., with "COFO" young people, we gathered at Sawyer, Mich., to sing "We shall overcome," and other freedom songs. Rachel MacNair, aged five sang it, "We shall overthrow." And this is the real issue within the Negro Freedom movement, not only between Rachel's Chicago, and COFO's Mississippi, but also within "Snick" - the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee itself. White Mississippians raved against our nonviolent volunteers, calling them hatemongers, but they were much confused when COFO stuck to freedom schools, literacy work, voter registration and Freedom Democratic Party organization. There were some marchings and testings in Mississippi this summer, of the public accommodations section of the civil rights bill. But no overthrow, no courting of arrest, no rabble rousing direct action. There were incidents of violence, but all of them by white racists.

Irene and I sampled voter and Freedom Party registration work. She also met everybody coming into the Freedom School, entertained the staff, helped a bit with fund raising for the Freedom Center building needed to continue the work. I loaned my car for dangerous work out in the county, built bookcases and shelves, and especially, worked with the forty Negro churches of Greenville. I preached four times, addressed four special meetings, and spoke up many times impromptu when called upon. It meant begging sleeping space in Negro homes, frxx, for our 35 volunteers, asking fearful ministers for meeting space in churches, for Freedom Democratic Party meetings, much talking with ministers, and promoting attendance at our final memorial service for the three Philadelphia, Miss., martyrs. These church contacts seemed to me to be especially valuable, and essential to the success of the work. We were indeed grateful to Mr. James Carter, of Greenville, for making these contacts.

Among white folk we visited Hodding Carter, III, liberal editor of the Delta Democrat-Times and found him very sympathetic, - provided we did not try to bring federal troops into Mississippi! We visited the president of the First National Bank, and found him not unfavorable to raising a limited amount of money for the Freedom Center building. Even the Chief of police said to us reluctantly, "They have a right to register these people, for that party, if they want to!" But when we took our Negro hostess, to the Downtowner Motel the manggers said, "We will gladly serve your Negro friend, but you are not welcome here. We will not serve you." We told them, "The Negro community in Greenville is riddled with fear. They tell us what they would never tell you." That we had reason to know:

"I'd like to take in your freedom workers, but I am afraid I would lose my old age assistance." "My husband's white boss would not like it. "Our landlady is white. She doesn't have to like it, but ..." Some churches refused to have our meetings, because the banks might foreclose. A taxi refused to take me in with Negro passengers, for fear of violence. Householders refused to register, "Because somebody might hurt us." When we held a mixed picnic with games at the Catholic School, a carload of white men parked and glared hatefully for two hours. We saw K.K.K. literature, loaded with the crudest sort of vitriol, in the name of white supremacy. We saw pay schedules for teachers, providing for a typical \$500 difference between white and colored salaries. We heard of contractors who kept more than half of the wages paid by the federal government for work done at the air base. When the workman protested, he was reimbursed, - and fired. So was the teacher wife of the first Negro to eat at a swanky "white" dining room, we were told. In the Greenville area, since we left on August 10, there have been two shootings, and three beatings of freedom workers. Inside Greenville, violence is infrequent, but fear is normal. We suspect the dominant whi & majority really want it that way.

2. MacNair, 8/20/64

We take our hats off to the COFO Volunteers. They are wonderful young people. They are of all religions, all regions. They lived on ten dollars a week, in 100 degree heat, without complaint. When news came to their orientation center, of the murder of three colleagues at Philadelphia, Miss., they were frightened, but more dedicated than ever. It was "The fire that would not be put out." Our praise also goes to local Negro leaders, who stand up for freedom and justice, at some risk to themselves. They ask only for what the Continental Congress fought for, but without violence. They appeal to the conscience of our nation and of our churches.

We had unforgettable moments. On Freedom Day, July 16, 250 Negroes appeared at Greenville court house to apply for voting privileges. 110 got thru that day. Half-scared, half elated, these people spread a spirit of confidence which is bound to be contagious. But oh, the pathos of the wistful ones who could not read and write. On August 2, 22 counties met at Friendship Baptist Church for a district convention of the Freedom Democratic Party. Nominees for delegate to the national Democratic Convention at Atlantic City put their claims: "I was beaten twice." "I spent fifteen days in jail!" There was the thrill of the welcome we had at churches where I preached, or we visited. There were quiet words of appreciation from individuals. Three taxi men refused payment. A plasterer and a butcher, whom we met at churches, took us to dinner, and said how much COFO's coming meant to them. The peanut man refused my nickel, and comforted me, "There would a lot more register, but they are just afraid to go." A woman on old age assistance, said earnestly, "I have been waiting all my life for this progress." A minister threatened with foreclosure, said, when we promised to raise real help, "I will sleep better tonight."

The real heroes of COFO are the seasoned young workers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) who lead the movement. Most of them are Negroes. They alone can work out in the rural areas where danger is greatest. Most of them have been jailed or beaten more than once. Three of them were our official leaders in Greenville. I said to George, "COFO needs a sense of humor." "Humor! To me this is war!" I think he was scared half the time. But he insisted on going to the most dangerous places.

The real issue was between these COFO workers, and the leaders and ministers of the churches. To the ministers, COFO workers were young, unchurched, sometimes untidy, sometimes fond of beer and profanity. To the COFO people, the churches were self-condemned, because they sang, "Staying on the battlefield," but stayed off it "religiously." Neither was quite correct. When we had our memorial service in Greenville, the COFO people did not know the Baptist hymns, and the church people did not know the freedom songs. One felt COFO needed faith in the triumph of the right by the will of God. And the church people needed to face the reality of the cross in this our time. Both knew that in the Philadelphia martyrs, that cross is very real - THAT men give their lives even today, and find satisfaction in standing for something. Both seek the secret of allegiance to something greater than self. And not thru "overthrow," but thru overcoming in his name.

W. MacNairs have been having a full reunion at Sawyer, Mich., this week - all thirteen of us! (Including Douglas David MacNair born in Ann Arbor, July 10) We return to Talladega College, Sept. 10, to teach and to preach as before. And to be chaplain to 420 students and an interracial faculty. Irene may work in the library again, and entertain students in our home. I may teach U.S. History again, in addition to religion and philosophy. We look forward to a good year with our new resident Dr. Herman H. Long. We return stronger for our month in Mississippi, with those wonderful young people.

Sincerely,

Irene and Everett MacNair

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