

Ans.

MERIDIAN PROJECT REPORT
Sept. 26 - Oct. 9, 1964

This report includes a financial statement, a report on general information about the office and staff meetings, a political program report by Joe Morse head of the political programs in Meridian and a Community Center report by Eric and Elaine Weinberger.

Once more for clarification the following people are working in the Meridian Office:

Preston Ponder - Project Director
Joe Morse - Political Programs
Gunter Prentz - Political Programs
Marjorie Henderson - Political Programs
Eddie Doss - Political Programs
Eric and Elaine Weinberger - Community Center
Gail Falk - Freedom School Co-ordinator
Linda Allenstein - Freedom School
Freeman Cocroft - Community Center (expected back Oct. 16)
Sandra Watts - Office
Ken and Elaine Sloat - Political programs
Clark County Staff - temporarily working out of the Meridian office
Mat Suarez - Project Director
Greg Kasle
Eric Alexandras
Chris Sperol

At a staff meeting held on October 1, 1964, the staff discussed many problems dealing with personnel and discipline. Dave Dennis was present at this meeting. There was a problem with who would be designated Project Director. Earlier, Mat Suarez came to Meridian to act as co-Project Director with Preston Ponder. This dual leadership created many problems among the staff as to who to turn to for leadership. At the meeting after a long discussion the staff voted on who they wanted as Project Director since it was decided that two leaders would be impossible for this project. Preston Ponder was chosen as the Meridian Project Director and Mat Suarez was chosen as the Project Director in Clark County.

On October 2, 1964 the staff held a meeting. Several things were discussed among these being the security rules. From now on anyone breaking the rules will be sent to the Project Director and from there to Jackson. The plans for the Freedom school were also discussed. The Baptist Seminary will not be ready to use until at least November so Gail Falk, the Freedom School Co-ordinator is working on getting churches for classes until we can get the Seminary. Meeting times were also set up for the week. There will be a staff meeting every Friday morning at 9:00AM. There will be a meeting of the political staff on every Monday and Thursday at 9:00AM of every week. The Community Center staff will meet every Wednesday at noon.

*rules?
Freedom
School
report?*

Another staff meeting was had on October 5, 1964. Here it was decided that the political staff would leaflet in the mornings and canvass in the afternoons. Right now all our energies are being concentrated on the Freedom day and the Freedom Elections. We decided to have a speaker every week for the Mass Meeting in preparation for Freedom Day. It was also discussed and decided that staff people would be assigned churches to attend each Sunday in order to become better acquainted with the community and to get certain messages to the churches.

Financial Report:

On October 6, 1964, the Community Center and the Office opened separate accounts at the Merchants and Farmers Bank in Meridian. Eric Weinberger, Elaine Weinberger and Mrs. Fannie Lee Chaney all signed for the account. Any two of these three names are required to sign a check. The Office opened an account in the name of Meridian COFO (in lieu of a better name) and Sandra Watts and Preston Ponder signed for the account, with the provision of either name signed to any check. The account took a week to clear so no checks were drawn for the past week and the Office operated on individual's money. From now on no money will be given out for food to any of the staff on the project. However, this constitutes a problem. When this rule was formulated we anticipated that all staff members would be receiving their checks on Thursday. However, the only person receiving a check was Preston Ponder. We were told that all those people put on staff in August would start receiving their checks in October. The staff people desperately need their checks since this money could take care of food money which now draws considerably on the office budget. The following is an itemized account of money that will be needed for the Meridian Project: (monthly)

Rent for the Freedom House	\$ 65.00
Rent for the Office	40.00
Telephone (two pay phones one for	25.00
office and one for the	
Freedom House)	
Utilities (Office).	17.00
Utilities (Freedom House).	7.00
Food for Freedom House	20.00
(Breakfast) (six people living there now	
and each will contribute \$5 from checks)	
Car repairs	25.00
(the reason for this figure is that we have such	
old cars which are in constant need of repair)	
Office Supplies	20.00
Dimes for Pay Phone (had other phone removed) . . .	20.00
	<u>\$239.00</u>

Our Credit Card was lost also so we will have to allot money for gas until it is returned. There is also a possibility that our office will be moved together with the Freedom House. This move would lessen our rent expense \$15

To repeat what has already been mentioned in the Political Report, this project is badly in need of a good car. Right now we have one car in operation and it is in very bad condition. We have one car in good working condition except that it does not have insurance and has been sitting out of operation since September 21. The car that belongs to Joe Morse (51 Mercury) is in poor shape and he is considering junking it and using the tires to put on the one good car we have. Out of the four cars we have, one is now in running condition, one is in need of \$50 worth of repairs, one has no insurance and one is in need of a new muffler and a new transmission. This problem has complicated things here in Meridian. Much time is spent waiting for transportation since the bus schedule does not run in many parts of the city where we work. It also complicates things from the standpoint that we cannot go to many of the meetings that are held outside the city due to lack of a car that could get us there. We have mentioned the need for a good car so many times in our reports that it seems it is becoming a habit, so whoever the powers that be, please note that the Meridian Project needs a good workable car!

From now on I will be submitting a financial report with each weekly report. It seems that we get our reports in every two weeks instead of every week, but we are trying to correct that situation. I will send the receipts each month to the Jackson office. Since we are starting off with a new bank account we shall also start off with a new accounting system and attempt to keep an itemized account of all money that is spent.

Preston Ponder - Project
Director
Sandra Watts - Office

REPORT OF POLITICAL PROGRAM

Sept. 26 - Oct. 9, 1964

The tempo of political activity in Meridian has stepped up a bit in the past 2 weeks. This is due mostly to the fact that we are better organized and now know exactly what we must do, i.e. make the Freedom Day on October 29th. and the Freedom Election on October 31 - November 2nd. both significant political experiences.

We have been pushing Voter Registration classes to prepare people for registration on Freedom Day. Since the last report, we have had 9 classes; 7 in homes and 2 in churches. A breakdown of classes by precincts is as follows: Precinct 1-2 classes, Precinct 4 - 1 class, Precinct 6 - 2 classes, Precinct 8 - 1 class, Precinct 9 - 3 classes. The number of individuals attending these classes ranged from one to ten persons depending on how much canvassing was done in the surrounding area before the class. These classes were taught by both COFO staff and precinct leaders. In precinct 1, it is done by the leaders of the precinct. In precinct 4 by a staff person (Margie Henderson) and the precinct captain (Mr. Williams). In precinct 6 entirely by the precinct secretary (Mrs. Turner). In precinct 8 by Joe Morse and the precinct captain (Rev. Turnipseed). Precinct 9 is done entirely by staff (Gunter Prentz, Barbara Chaney, Miriam Kerster and Dorothy Knox).

In talking to the local people we have been trying to stress precinct organization, i.e. section captains, and block captains. We have been successful in getting some type of block captain system operating in precincts 1,4,6,8, and 9. Precincts 4,8, and 9 have just begun this organizing. Precincts 1 and 6 have had a degree of organization for about 3 weeks. We will continue to put emphasis on precinct organization with the hope that in a week or two we will be able to start political education classes in most of the precincts, using the Freedom Primer sent from the Jackson Office. The first covers the Convention Challenge and the Freedom Election, which is very apropos material at this time and should arouse interest.

The Lauderdale County Executive Committee met on October 6th. It was decided at this meeting that 2 churches would be used for the political dinner for Johnson and the Democratic ticket. October 26 was set as the date for this dinner with October 22 being an alternate date. A speaker has not yet been decided upon. The chairman, Mr. Young and Joe Morse were to decide on a speaker. Tickets will be sold by the entire committee as soon as they are printed. The prices will be \$5.00, \$10.00 and \$15.00 a plate. The Committee has been unable to secure an office space for a Johnson campaign headquarters. Unless a truck or trailer can be used for a reasonable price (more reasonable than a Hertz rented truck) it looks as if the Johnson Campaign Headquarters will have to be here in the COFO Office. We have been distributing Johnson bumper stickers and pins for about 2 weeks now together with the Freedom Democrats stickers.

We held a Mass Meeting on Friday, October 2, with about 50 people in attendance. It was the Kick-off Rally for the

October 29th. Freedom Day. We talked a little about the programs COYO has in Meridian and spent the rest of the meeting discussing the Freedom Day and the voting laws in Mississippi. The second Mass Meeting in preparation for Freedom Day was held on Wednesday, October 7th. Mrs. Annie Devine was the featured speaker. She talked very quietly and in terms understood by the people. She seemed to get her message across to the people at the meeting. About 55 local people were in attendance at this meeting. We now have about 30 people definitely committed to go to the Courthouse to register on Freedom Day. It seems that it will take much re-contact to get more people to the Courthouse on the 29th. of October. We have found that for the Mass Meetings, it is better to canvass and be sure of getting about 60 people than to leaflet the entire city and have only 30 persons there. We will make a decided attempt before the next meeting to get car pools from precincts to transport the people to the meeting.

On Sunday September 27, we took a car and a bus to Jackson for a meeting of the Freedom Democratic Party. There were about 25 people from Meridian on the bus and 15 from Philadelphia. The bus left at 10:00AM and arrived back in Meridian at 9:30PM that evening. The meeting gave all those who attended a "shot in the arm" and some new ideas on how to work through the FDP.

We also sent 2 staff people to the 4th. District Rally in Canton on October 3rd. We heard James Farmer and other Civil Rights Leaders in Madison County speak about the struggle in Mississippi and its significance to the nation. Joe Morse met a Mrs. Stewart, a representative of the Woman's International League for Peace and Freedom. She was invited, by Joe, to visit Meridian on Monday. Mrs. Stewart accepted the invitation but could only be in Meridian for a few hours before she caught a bus to Birmingham. She was very interested in the whole project and we may be getting some funds from her organization in the near future.

One thing I would like to suggest is that we get a good car on this project. We have only one car in operation now since the police told me that my car had a faulty muffler. I have decided to junk my car since the transmission also needs work. My tires can be used on another project car which has bad tires. We waste much valuable time waiting around the office for rides. The one car must take care of hauling clothes for the welfare committee, transporting the Freedom School co-ordinator around town, carrying the community center children to and from the park and then it must be used for the full-time job of bringing 8 canvassers to and from different parts of the city. We have wasted up to 2 1/2 hours a day per person waiting for transportation. Cabs are too expensive and the busses often do not run in the right places. Our car situation also makes it impossible to attend any meetings outside of Meridian since none of our cars are in good enough shape to travel out on the highway.

We will try to have political education classes in the individual precincts in the next two weeks.

Joe Morse

MERIDIAN COMMUNITY CENTER

Activities - September 1964

Staff:

Permanent: Elaine Weinberger, Eric Weinberger, Freeman Goerft (On vacation last two weeks of month)
Temporary: Dr. Irma Gurdjev, (child psychologist, Princeton, N.J.) mid-September 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ weeks; Gail Falk, teacher; Mrs. Marion Kirsten, social worker, New York City; Rick Batdorff, sculptor, Oregon.

Current Activities

Grade school childrens:

2:30 to 6 PM (9 AM until 6 PM until school opened)

I. Crafts

Puppet making, doll making, making decorated boxes, making leather footballs and belts.

II. Arts

Finger paintings, water painting, folded paper painting, papier mache and chicken wire sculpture.

III. Reading to children and being read to by them, and singing

IV. Dramatic - extemporaneous puppet shows, and skits with costumes made by the children.

V. Outdoor Activities- Swimming (pool now closed), fishing and frog catching, ball-games and playground activities.

High School Student and Adults:

I. Fabric Distribution - new parcels of very good fabric have been arriving and are being distributed to ladies of the community who come to the center. Recipients of fabric are encouraged to attend voter classes at the center and to register to vote.

II. Clothing Distribution - The clothing distribution program was re-organized. It is under the direction of Mrs. Cheney with help from MSU members. Almost all clothing has been distributed, new shipments expected soon.

III. Tutorial Work - 6:30 PM to 7:30 PM or later every evening, grade school and high school students are helped with their current school work on an individual basis.

IV. A small group has been reading scenes from James Baldwin's "Blues for Mister Charlie". A good deal of interest has been expressed and we expect the group to grow larger and to become involved in rehearsals for a production for this play or another for presentation to the Meridian Community.

V. Library- getting limited general use, a Freedom Corner has been set up consolidating our large selection of books on Negro history, the movement, by and about Negroes, etc. This has attracted considerable attention. Books are being sent out with staff members to precinct meetings so that people can withdraw books without having to come into town.

VI. Spontaneous Activity - temporary staff people occasionally engage casual groups including volunteer staff and high schoolers here for tutorial work in readings from books of poetry, sculpture demonstrations, etc.

Additional programs are now in developing stages. Details in later reports.

On Wednesday, Eric spent the morning at Bethel Baptist Church where clothes are distributed by Barbara Cheney Moss. A staff person should work with her whenever possible to help in limiting quantities per family. Vitamins distributed.

In the afternoon Eric and Elaine did some canvassing in the 4th precinct. We met Mrs. Willie E. Lancaster, 3306 11th St. who housed the Schwerners when they first arrived in Meridian, and housed white volunteers this summer. A member of the NAACP, she showed with pride, a picture of herself attending a NAACP banquet in New York.

We talked about the community Center and its activities and she expressed a great interest in the sewing classes. She has a heart condition and is unable to climb stairs so I suggested that since the sewing machines are portable perhaps we could have a sewing lesson in her house. She was very responsive to this idea and said that she would organize a class, get a few ladies together and have a class in her home.

When the center first started she contributed an electric heater, a school-type desk chair and was in other ways co-operative. She could be a very valuable contact in voter registration work in the 4th. Her neighbors spoke highly of her.

We visited about a dozen homes in the vicinity of Mrs. Lancaster's house. We met Mr. Roberts, a blind man, about 3 doors away who, I hope, the voter reg. people will further encourage to vote. State law provides that he can take the test orally. To all the people with whom we talked, Eric gave a bottle of Squibb vitamins (Dr. Moldovan's shipment) with the encouragement to come to the Community Center for more.

Elaine began typing sides for cast of "Blues for Mr. Charlie".

Community Center Staff Meeting: Weinbergers, Miriam Horsten, Rick Batdorff, Linda Allenstein, Gail Falk.

Miriam will compose new welfare forms, Elaine suggested she give workshop on welfare know-how, etc. Rick will work on getting a table for center, Linda will continue work on setting up day-care center, Gail trying to set up Freedom School.

Vitamins distributed at Mass Meeting in evening. Mrs. Devine spoke.

Thursday: Eric spent day at Mt. Olive Church where Georgianna Dace distributes clothes - found that this distribution point not functioning but Georgianna does ~~not~~ make up boxes for people who submit a GOFO welfare forms to voter reg. canvassers.

Attended MEU meeting where petition that will precede Freedom Study Day was being prepared. Staff will assist the "writing committee" later in the week. Distributed vitamins.

Elaine had sewing class in the morning, afternoon continued work on sides for cast.

Friday: Spent day catching up on general office work, correspondence; worked with children in Community Center.

Evening: Reviewed scenes of play with female lead.