

## MERIDIAN PROJECT REPORT

This report will cover December 15th to January 13th. The report on the weeks between December 15th and January 1st will be sketchy, due to the fact that most of the staff went North for Christmas.

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### CURRENT STAFF

George Smith Jr., Project Director  
Joe Morse, Director of Political programs  
Gail Falk, Director of Freedom School .....Leaving Jan. 15th  
Eric Weinberger, Director of Community Center  
Preston Ponder.... leaving Jan. 15th  
Ken Slote.....Leaving Jan. 13th  
Pinkie Slote....  
Frank Wright  
Judy Wright  
Louise Somlyo....Leaving Jan. 28th  
Gunter Frentz  
Margie Henderson...Leaving between Jan. 15th & 18th  
Sam Brown  
Willie Clark....Leaving Jan 13th  
Barbara Chaney Moss

### REMAINING STAFF AND ASSIGNMENTS

George Smith Jr., Project Director  
Joe Morse, Director of Political Programs, FDP & Freedom Vote  
Frank Wright, Director of Freedom School, Newspaper  
Eric Weinberger, Director of Community Center  
Judy Wright, Freedom Schools and Office, school desegregation  
Gunter Frentz, Testing Coordinator, school desegregation  
Barbara Chaney Moss, Political Program  
Sam Brown, Political Program

### COMMUNITY CENTER REPORT

- Jan. 5 - Arrived back in Meridian at 11:00 P.M. Moved into Center to live.  
Jan. 6 - Since Elaine is not here, Judy Wright agreed to take the sewing classes if they can be re-started.  
Eric's afternoon grade school group worked with a tape recorder.  
Jan. 7 - General clean-up. Children played with new dart game. Freeman Cocroft left to return to school  
Jan. 8 - Repair of broken downstairs window and upstairs door. Phone moved to political office. Long staff meeting. FDP steering committee meeting in evening.  
Jan. 9 - Small grade school group all day.  
Jan. 10 - Grade school group in afternoon.  
Jan. 11 - The Free Southern Theatre gave PURLIE VICTORIOUS at First Baptist in the evening. Eric and Sam Brown experimented with copper enameling equipment just acquired.

### FREEDOM SCHOOL REPORT

From the beginning of November until Christmas vacation, we had Freedom School on the third floor of the Baptist Seminary every day from 4:30 to about 6:00. While there were sporadic good classes, this did not work out too well because very few students came, for a lot of reasons; the hour, homework, parents, cold rooms. We have not opened FS since vacation and it is up in the air right now about what to do. I would



recommend that, rather than struggling to try to have regular classes, the time be spent in intensive individual work with the kids we do have. For instance, I have been tutoring Bettie Manuel in algebra, French and Plate - very successfully.

I have made arrangements for Bettie Manuel and Willie Clark to go to school in the North. Willie will be living in New York with Ken and Pinkie Slete; his school is still undecided, but Bettie will go to Newton High School in Boston.

When I'm in the North, I'll try to collect more information on college counseling for kids, which needs more attention.

Roscoe Jones called about three MSU meetings, the first since the silent protest. They have been attended by 15-20 kids, sadly small compared to the enormous meetings last summer. I have only attended the meetings and offered technical help. Roscoe seems to be recovering from his recent immobility and is beginning to move again. He had too many "advisors".

#### TESTING Gail Falk

By mid-December we had collected a large number of affidavits from testing the public accommodations section of the CR bill. I worked on organizing these, working with George Smith on getting people to test places which had not yet been tested, and working with the lawyers on setting up a case. The plan is to institute a suit against all the restaurants in the downtown area. Also, the Royal Theatre. There remain only a few establishments which haven't been tested. In connection with this, I've had long talks with many managers of restaurants, especially Mrs. Phipps of the Triangle and Mrs. Gray of Merchant's Grill.

Have been part of most of the testing, as a white spectator, and have seen that the affidavits get written. Have been doing all the coordination of this with the Jackson Office and lawyers.

#### Gunter Frenz

Have organized a group of ladies to use "white" laundromats in groups of two or three. This had led to conferences with the owners of the laundries, especially a Mr. Reilly, who owns about five of them. All the owners agree to desegregate "if everybody else does"; all except one hold-out, who may come around yet. Mr. Reilly has agreed to repaint all his places, omitting the "white only" signs.

#### WHITE COMMUNITY PROJECT

We have had several spontaneous visits recently from young, local white girls. The first one told us that she had heard so many incredible things about us that she decided to see for herself. Some of the things she told us about our "reputation", prompted Judy Wright and Pinkie Slete to work on a "brochure" about WHAT IS COFO for mailing or distribution to the white community.

Gail has had two excellent long talks with Judge Neville, who is on the Citizen's Council blacklist. Judge Neville agreed to try to arrange some meetings with people in the white community and left us with the feeling that there are enormous opportunities for us in the white community here. He further suggested that the city attorney (Mr. Goldman) is somewhat friendly to us and might be



helpful in ridding us of Lee Roberts, our bloodhound in the police department.

In the second meeting, Judge Neville was helpful in answering our questions about city and beat elections. We couldn't seem to find the information we needed elsewhere (we are hoping to run some candidates for these elections), and the Judge, and Mr. Reedy, a local white lawyer were very friendly.

#### MISCELLANEOUS

Judy Wright has been preparing a mailing to go out to the people who donated money in her recent fund-raising in Boston. Pinkie Slote sent a mailing (form enclosed) to the telephone companies in various cities, asking that they forward it to the person whose phone number was on the envelope. The object was to ask people who phoned collect during the summer, and thus ran up our huge phone bill, to volunteer to foot ~~their~~ their part of the bill now. Then CORE stepped in and paid the bill, but we have gotten a small response to the mailing and will send what we get to CORE. We feel kind of honor-bound about this bill.

The arrival of George Smith as project director has really galvanized this project; he seems to have all the talents we need most and is extremely organized. We find ourselves keeping the office cleaner than ever before and working hard and systematically. We are going to be very short-staffed, but feel that the project is really going to start moving...especially since our FDP steering committee has a new Chairman and is solidifying nicely.

#### POLITICAL REPORT

During the past month we have worked almost entirely on the Freedom Democratic Party Congressional Challenge. We began setting up workshops for members of the party on December 10, to explain the challenge in detail. There seemed to be quite a bit of interest in the possibility of again showing the nation that Mississippi Negroes were not about to wait any longer for rights they are guaranteed in the Constitution.

Between the 14th and 18th of Dec., the FDP held precinct meetings in some of the precincts in the city of Meridian. These precinct meetings were not as well attended as we had hoped - there were from 5 to 25 persons at each meeting. The FDP is having trouble finding meeting places in Meridian...the ministers of the city decided in a meeting of the Ministerial Alliance that since the FDP is under a court injunction, they wanted nothing to do with it. This was quite a setback for us. It looks like ministers the country over are usually the last people to become concerned about their people. Their first concern is to "keep their hands clean by keeping their hands off". The FDP now has only 2 places to hold meetings; the Meridian Baptist Seminary where we hold Freedom School, and here in our office, where we can seat about 35 people, if need be.

The FDP held its county convention on Friday, Dec. 15 to determine who will go to Washington for the Challenge. The Lauderdale County executive committee decided that at this county convention, a new executive committee should be chosen. They have found that only about half of the originally elected committee members come to their weekly meetings. The way it turned out, the county convention was a flop, only 12 people showed up. From all indications, it seems there had been some feeling against the FDP by the local "Tom" leadership. They realize that the FDP is capable



of organizing the poorer class of people and therefore it is a thrust against the position of the "Toms". They had apparently suggested to many people that it was not good and very dangerous to attend this county convention - as a result, many people were scared out. Most of the 12 people in attendance wanted to go to Washington. Tentative plans were made then. They did not elect an executive committee as such, but decided to merge the steering committee of Meridian and the Lauderdale County Executive Committee until they were able to get more participation from others in the community.

The Meridian steering committee consists of about 10 of the most active people in the community. They work on such things as school desegregation, testing, the congressional challenge etc.

It was very strange to see more people going to Washington than had attended our county meeting - it seems to be additional proof that the people here were intimidated before the county convention. This is the way the whites of Meridian manage to hold down any attempt of the Negroes to organize. They use the Negro "Toms" as mouthpieces and are much more effective and much less conspicuous than if the intimidation were done by the whites themselves.

As it turned out, we had 16 people from Meridian going to Washington. Gunter Prentz, Gail Falk, staff members, went along as drivers. Gunter also acted as a picket captain while in Washington during the White House demonstration.

4 high school students went from Meridian and the remaining 9 were adults from the community. Ken Slote was the transportation coordinator for this trip. Financing came from an FDP fund-raising dinner in October and partly from donations by those in the cars. Gas and oil cost about \$75.00 for each car. 2 cars went from here: the project station wagon and a car owned by the only Negro minister active in the FDP here. Four of our people went by bus. They all left on Jan. 2 or 3 and arrived home on Jan. 8.

The people were very excited by the trip and held a very lively meeting on Jan. 8. Several reports of the trip were given and a discussion was held on every department and agency visited. The welfare Dept. had given them new insights into how they could get Negroes actually to receive the compensation they should be justly given. Some had met with the Health, Ed., and Welfare Dept. and had been told that Negroes had a right to be on the staff of the local agencies. But most of all, these people saw in Washington how the Federal Govt. was willing to give them only what they demanded and then often what they gave was only "Tokenism," something they have been receiving from the white man for hundreds of years.

The next phase of the challenge will be the taking of depositions. Ken Slote has taken names of possible witnesses from our incident reports and Freedom Day affidavits. We have now about 19 or 20 good evidences of discrimination and harrassment in Lauderdale County.

We have begun to work in earnest on a Beat election which is coming up on March 9. The FDP has decided to try to run a Negro in this election. So we will have to have an independent nominating petition in by January 28. Until then we will need to spend more time in Lauderdale County - rural area.



Also we intend to run at least one Negro candidate in the city election in May. Between now and June 8, the date of the city election, we will have a huge job of publicity to do. It may be possible to elect a Negro running as an independent because the way things are set up, the entire city elects all the councilmen. ~~and they all are~~ We may have enough registered voters city-wide to elect one candidate.

Right now the political staff is working very hard to get as many people as possible registered to vote before the deadline of February 8. Since it is too late to have people take the registration test, in time to vote on June 8, we are concentrating on those people who have already taken the test. We have the names and addresses of about 200 Negro people as they were printed in the newspaper in the past two months. These people have been meeting with all types of discrimination. Often the registrar tells them that "I can't find your name or application" - even after their name appeared in the paper as having taken the test. The people are also being told to "come back in late February," too late to vote in the city election. We are currently checking and rechecking these people who we know took the test.

George Smith, project director

Pinky Slote, secretary